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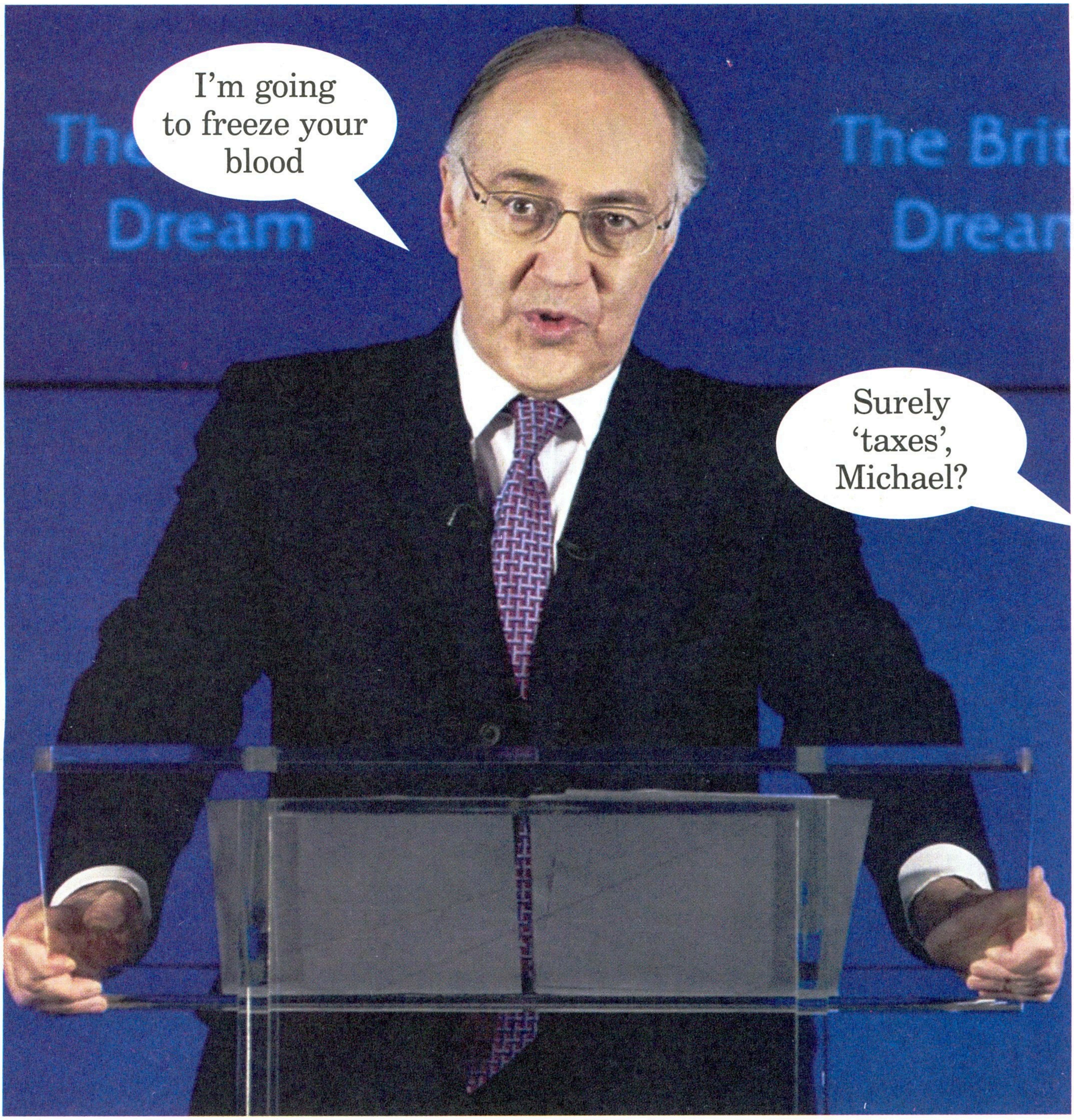
PRIVATE EYE

HOWARD'S DREAM



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BT

Gnome

The following letter has been sent to the Secretary of State for Culture in response to an advertisement for a new Chairman of the BBC

Dear Mrs Jowell,

As you know, I am an extremely rich businessman with no experience of broadcasting at all. This, I would suggest, makes me an ideal candidate for this important position.

If I were to be given the job as Chairman, I would have two vital aims for the BBC:

1. To preserve at all costs the corporation's independence and impartiality. To do this, I would keep in close contact with government ministers such as yourself to ensure that any decisions I might take would meet with their approval.

2. To preserve at all costs the integrity and public service tradition of the BBC. I would seek to maximise the profits of the corporation by placing it in the hands of a private company, possibly the Gnome organisation.

Yours
Lord Gnome
The Hinduja Suite
The Vaz Hilton, Delhi.

PS. Incidentally, you may remember we met at a fund-raising salsa evening, given by the charming Mr Mandelson. I was the one with the white tuxedo and the money!!

PRIVATE EYE Live!

INCREDIBLE CD OFFER

HURRY!
Offer closes 2 March
See page 31

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6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN. Tel: 020 7437 4017.
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ABC

Still Exclusive!

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O·B·N

Miss Jowell is convinced that Mr Blair has no plans to give up. She says the party forgot how much it owed him when it almost failed to support him in the tuition fee debate. "I would jump in front of a bus to save him," she says.

Daily Telegraph

Submitted by Mark Harper

£10 paid for entries put forward for the Order of the Brown Nose.

HOW clever of Tony Blair to entrust the latest inquiry into WMD and intelligence to Lord Butler, who as cabinet secretary informed the Scott inquiry that it was right for ministers to suppress the truth – and whose forensic powers were confirmed by his 1994 investigation into Jonathan Aitken, which concluded that "I can confirm that I do not regard Jonathan Aitken as having lied".

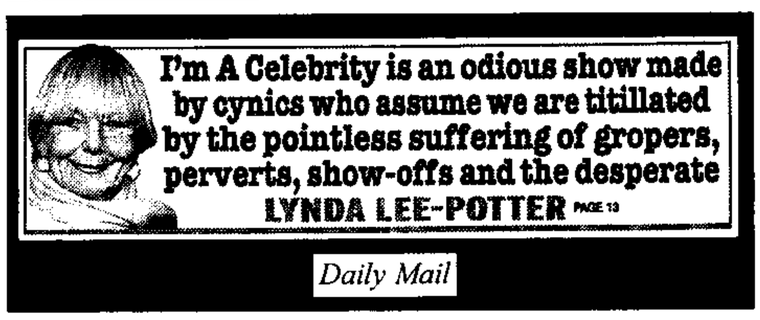
It was smart, too, to give a place on Butler's new committee of inquiry to Sir John Chilcot, who was hand-picked by the PM a couple of years ago to be the "staff counsellor" for MI5 and MI6. As the official agony aunt to the British intelligence service, he will not wish to add to the spooks' agonies.

But the most inspired selection of all is surely that of Ann Taylor MP, who already owes her chairmanship of the unaccountable intelligence and security committee to Blair's patronage. As we revealed recently (*Eye* 1098), Taylor is hardly a disinterested observer: she was herself involved in the famous "September dossier" that explained Blair's reasons for going to war.

On 18 September 2002 an official in Blair's office sent this memo to chief of staff Jonathan Powell and Alastair Campbell: "The PM has asked Ann Taylor to read through the dossier in draft and give us any comments. He stressed that it is for her and for her only and that no one else outside this building was seeing it in draft. I'm contacting John Scarlett to work out how this should happen – needs to be tomorrow."

Taylor went to Scarlett's office at 8 o'clock the next morning, read the dossier and gave her comments to the spy chief – who then passed them on to Blair. She advised that it "needs to come across as an impartial, professional assessment of the threat", and that the PM should "undercut critics" by explaining why Saddam should be stopped now.

So the only person outside No 10 and the JIC who was trusted to help with the dossier (and who also expressed a wish to see Blair's critics undercut) is now sitting on the inquiry into its contents. One wonders why Blair didn't go the whole hog and add Alastair Campbell to Lord Butler's team of independent inquisitors.


I'm A Celebrity is an odious show made by cynics who assume we are titillated by the pointless suffering of gropers, perverts, show-offs and the desperate
LYNDA LEE-POTTER PAGE 13
Daily Mail

LORD INGE, chosen by Tony Blair as one of the five members of the Butler inquiry into intelligence on Iraq, has resigned from a firm that employs former intelligence staff following questioning by *Private Eye*.

When Inge was appointed to sit in judgment on whether our spies were wrong about Iraq or whether their messages were distorted, he was still a member of the Hakluyt Foundation, a supervisory board for Hakluyt, a firm which hires former MI6 agents to work for private companies like Shell and BP. It is also likely to be seeking work offering firms intelligence assessments related to the Iraq war.

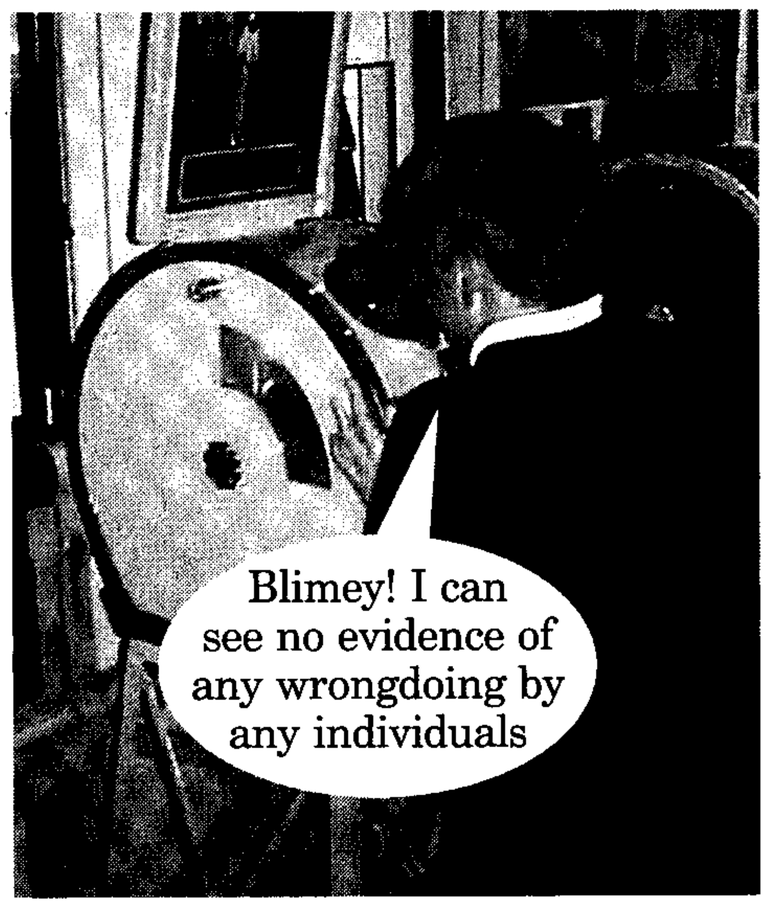
According to one Hakluyt director, the Hakluyt Foundation is supposed to ensure that the firm is not seen as "a tear-away bunch of former officials". However, Inge and fellow directors have not always been able to stop Hakluyt's tear-away tendencies.

Last year Hakluyt featured in an extraordinary collapsed libel trial after it made lurid allegations against a Czech businessman in a report for oil firm Ramco (see Eye 1073). In 2002 it was revealed that Hakluyt had hired a private spy to infiltrate German and international green and left wing groups.

When he was first approached by *Private Eye*, Lord Inge said he "didn't know yet" if there was a potential conflict of interest between his Hakluyt work and his service on the Butler inquiry. He explained that he had "yet to fill in my things of interest form" [*sic*] and referred inquiries to the cabinet office. Two days later, the cabinet office told the *Eye* that Lord Inge had "stood down from the Hakluyt Foundation".

As a former chief of defence staff he still has a number of other jobs with a military or Middle Eastern flavour. He advises Investcorp, a Middle Eastern bank, as well as arms firms Vickers and BAE Systems. Last November he became an adviser to OWR AG, a German firm making gas masks, protective suits, decontamination trailers and other specialist protection against nuclear, biological and chemical warfare – precisely the kind of kit that wasn't needed in the fight against Saddam Hussein.

WHAT THE LORD BUTLER SAW



NEWS

HOW shy and retiring of Steve Norris to launch his campaign to be Conservative mayor of London with a biography that doesn't mention Jarvis, the company that generously employs him as chairman (and was responsible for the Potters Bar rail disaster, King's Cross derailment, not to mention assorted PFI cock-ups).

The biography, distributed by the Conservative party, reveals that Norris chairs the Prince Michael International Road Safety Awards Scheme, is president of Intelligent Transport Systems (UK), vice-president of the National Society for Clean Air and was director of the Road Haulage Association. But there's no word about Jarvis, where he became interim chairman last November.

As a spokesperson tells the *Eye*, this is "a political biography" and so lists "not business things but public sector things". And Jarvis's involvement in upgrading the London underground isn't political?

THE name Jarvis has also become an albatross, it seems, for Jarvis Primary Health Ltd, which last October failed to pick up any of a dozen "NHS Lift" schemes for PFI health centres.

The bosses' solution? They're changing the name to the Jarvis-free PatientFirst Partnerships. The kiss-of-death tag Jarvis has also been excised from Jarvis LUL Services. Henceforth its PFI contracts will be managed by something called "Engenda".

Asked why Jarvis would not be using its own name for PFI bidding, the company explained that "this approach reflects a common trend in the industry which sees our competitors involved in consortia bidding under different names".

ATTEMPTS to get Dame Shirley Porter to cough up the £37m surcharge she owes for her part in the Westminster gerrymandering scandal in the 1980s appear to be unravelling fast.

Earlier this month John Magill, Westminster council's former district auditor, issued his final public interest report into the "Building Stable Communities" policy (aka gerrymandering) and concluded that, er, it was all a long time ago. Magill's report says: "It is in the public interest that the council and others look forward rather than back". A view which was seized on with glee by Simon Milton, current leader of the council, and which came as a great relief to 12 former councillors and officers who feared being hauled over the coals for their part in the scandal.

A week after Magill called the hounds off, Dame Shirl's lawyers, doubtless sensing a change in wind direction, announced that they will launch proceedings in Guernsey to unfreeze £34m of assets which Stephenson Harwood, the City lawyers charged with finding the former council leader's hidden fortune, had identified and got the courts to freeze last year. Although Westminster council responded initially by saying they will oppose the application, it may not be long before they, too, tire of pursuing their quarry. It was all a long time ago, after all.

Street Of Shame

A FORTNIGHT ago one Andy Bull was convicted of downloading internet child porn and had been sentenced to three months in jail. Usually, this would be the cue for the tabloids to incite a lynch mob round to the offender's house. That the *Mirror* was the only paper even to report the news might have had something to do with the fact that it is one of the few not to have employed Bull.

The *Express* group, where Bull had worked as deputy editor on the Sunday, was strangely reticent. In January, *Express* readers had been treated to stories headlined "Worst ever kiddie porn perv jailed", "Internet's filth fuels scourge of paedophiles", and "Teacher had child porn", yet they would have searched in vain for the details of Bull's case.

Nor could the *Times* (or any News International organ) summon up an interest in his conviction, though in the previous three weeks it too had published news items about the dangers of the internet and paedophilia. This omission could surely not have been motivated by the fact that Bull was formerly in charge of the online version of the *Times*.

Meanwhile Brian Hunt, former deputy arts editor at the London *Evening Standard* and music critic for the *Daily Telegraph*, received a three-year prison sentence last week for having a collection of more than 25,000 indecent pictures of children, thousands of which were said to be at the "extreme range". There is now consternation on the *Standard* arts desk where people are worried that Hunt may have left some awkward pictures on the office system, filed away among his old reviews of Beethoven quartet. Strangely, the *Standard* has not found space for any of this.

PS: In January the *Daily Express*'s top football writer Rob Shepherd was given 14 months in jail for attacking a man in a wine bar, so Richard "Dirty" Desmond is still in line to win the coveted British Press Award for "Media mogul with the most hacks in the slammer".

GOOD to see Thames Valley police have their crime-fighting priorities right. They have just been forced to hand back a Reading-based news agency's phone records that had been secretly obtained in order to trace reporters' sources.

Inspector Knacker's initial excuses – about serious crime, official secrets and corruption – turned to dust when it emerged that officers were merely trying to find out who among their ranks had been talking to the INS news group.

Faced with a high court claim that the phone records had been obtained unlawfully from BT, Thames Valley police gave in, agreed to pay the agency's costs and gave an undertaking that any records would be destroyed and not used by any officers.

***OBSERVER* columnist Euan Ferguson is nursing a broken wrist after an unseemly collision with a large piece of sculpture on London's South Bank, following a particularly refreshing lunch date at the nearby Oxo Tower.**

The emotional hack has been telling friends that he was assaulted by the sculpture, a six-foot ampersand which is part of a series of punctuation symbols erected along the side of the river. He has received little sympathy from colleagues, however. As one hack remarked: "He has spent long enough murdering the English language – he shouldn't be surprised to find it fighting back for once."

WHY is *Sunday Telegraph* editor Dominic Lawson looking so pleased with himself, while the rest of the Telegraph group's hacks are quaking in their boots at the thought of being sacked by Andrew "Brillo Pad" Neill?

Dom has become friendly with Aidan Barclay, son of Sir David, and now fancies that he will be given the editorship of the *Daily Torygraph* if and when the new regime kicks in. This would drive his old rival Charles Moore quite mad.

THE *Daily Mail* pronounced itself disgusted by the illiteracy of the nation's youth after a survey showed them to be unable to complete famous quotations from literature.

"The opening of Wordsworth's *Daffodils*, for example, reads, I wondered lonely as a sheep, goat, tree, bear, daffodil or pigeon, according to some," the paper tutted. "The correct word is 'cloud'."

Quite right. But as a significant percentage of 25 to 44 year olds – but apparently no one on the *Mail* backbench – could tell you, the second word of the poem is "wandered", not "wondered".

INTERVIEWED in November 2001, *Mirror* editor Piers Morgan was clear about what we would be seeing in the new, serious *Daily Mirror*.

"There are a lot of bright, young people coming in to buy the paper to read about this inane, cretinous television we all got consumed by and it was tempting to keep hammering at it as the main news of the day. I don't want to go back to that."

During the recent run of ITV's *I'm A Celebrity... Get Me Out of Here!*, the *Mirror* featured the show and its stars on the front page on 12 out of a possible 13 days. It continued to dominate the front page for two days after the show itself had finished, and the paper even ran a two-day series of highlights from an interview with contestant Jordan which had been conducted by no less a person than the editor himself.

NOW that he is no longer a Hollinger executive, Conrad Black has lost his corporate email address. And it seems he may be losing friends as well.

On 7 February Black sent a message announcing his new private email address to chums and colleagues who might still wish to keep in touch with him. He also thanked them all for their support. Remarkably for such a well connected chap, there were only about two dozen names on the list.

They included a few right-wing cronies in the US – former Thatcher speechwriter John O'Sullivan, former Bush speechwriter David Frum, former *Times* hack Tunku Varadarajan and New York *Sun* editor Seth Lipsky. Plus two British authors, Andrew Roberts and William Shawcross, and a handful of old Hollinger loyalists. Oh, and Barbara Amiel's ex-husband George Jonas.

Is there really no one else willing to be Conrad's pen pal?

THE NEOPHILIACS

"Botox is the new heroin." — *Sunday Times* Style section.

"Stupid – it's the new black." — *Sunday Times* Style section.

"Streets are the new roads." — Advert from Southwark Council, *Guardian*.

"Are the Conservatives really the new New Labour?" — *Grauniad* headline.

"Are residents' associations the new book clubs?" — *Daily Telegraph*.

"Are India the new Australia?" — *The Wisden Cricketer*.

"Is Sadie the new Paula?" — *News of the World*.

"Gambling. It's the new yoga." — *Sunday Times* Style section.

"At the risk of sounding like an entry for Private Eye's Neophiliacs column, I think traditional is the new new." — Victoria Moore, *New Statesman*.

HACKWATCH SPECIAL

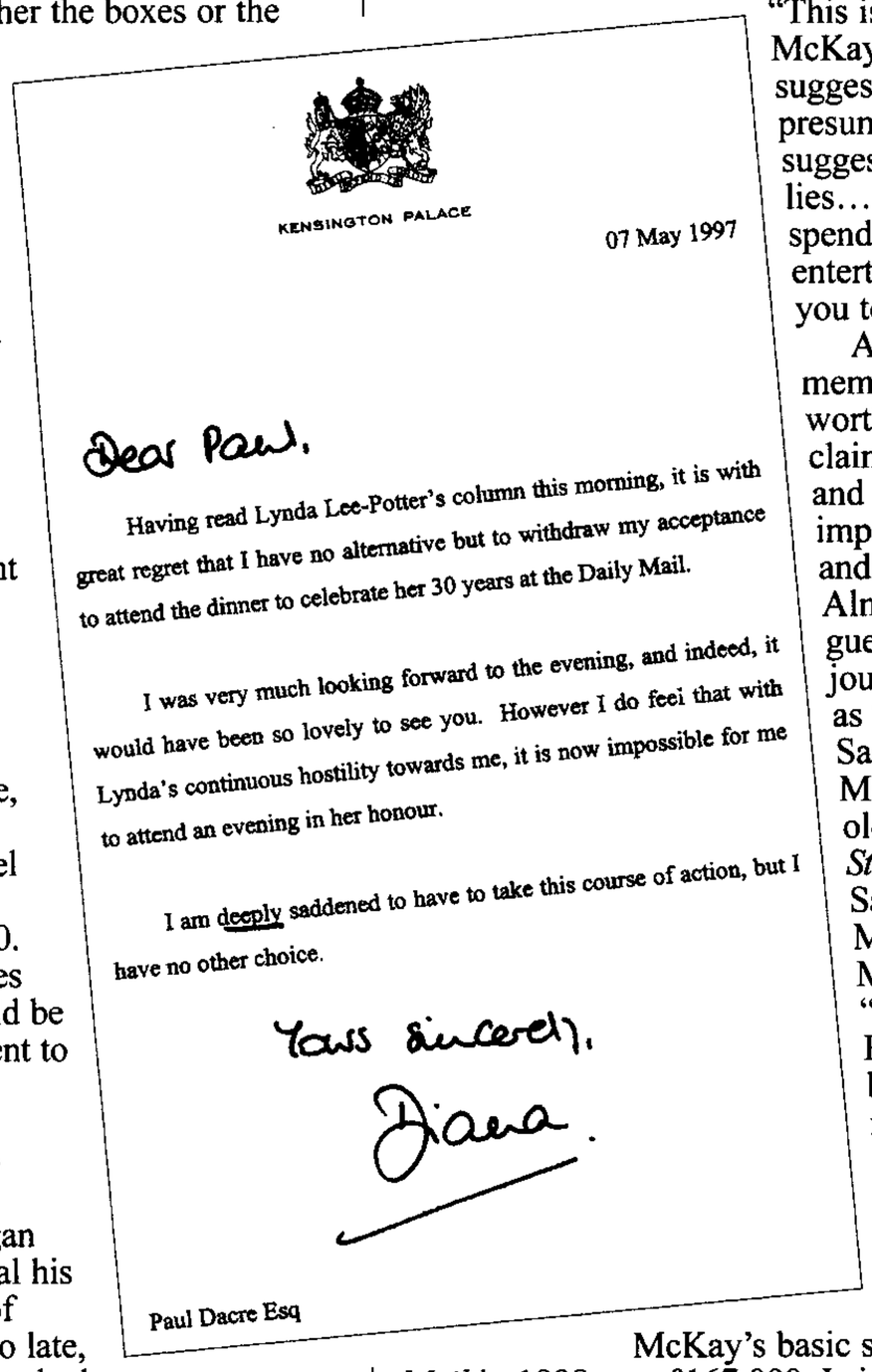
The Dacre Dossier

WHEN Nigel Dumpster retired from the *Daily Mail*, his rather splendid third-floor office was vacated by the rest of the diary team on the orders of editor Paul Dacre, who wanted to move them into the newsroom where he could keep an eye on them. This led to an unseemly scramble among *Mail* executives for the old Dempster billet.

First in was greasy managing editor Lawrie Sear, who tried to establish squatters' rights by storing boxes of internal correspondence in there. But he neglected to seal either the boxes or the office. Next day the office resembled an Iraqi ministry after the fall of Baghdad, packed with hacks leafing through the files – mostly memos to and from Dacre, written in the late 1990s.

And very revealing they were too – particularly about the pay disparity at the *Mail* between Dacre's pets and the galley slaves. They show that in 1998 the salary of royal correspondent Richard Kay was £91,000. Other notable earners included: Geoffrey Levy, £97,000; Paul Johnson, £105,000; Simon Heffer, £140,000; Keith Waterhouse, £168,000, sportswriter Ian Wooldridge, £175,000. Nigel Pratt-Dumpster himself collected a modest £205,000. Six years and many pay-rises later, all these salaries should be increased by about 30 percent to bring them up to date.

This was all most embarrassing for Sear, who ordered the papers to be shredded forthwith and began trying desperately to conceal his security lapse in the hope of escaping Dacre's wrath. Too late, alas! Many of the documents had already been handed over to Lord Gnome. Here are some of the people who feature in this thoroughly dodgy dossier…



KENSINGTON PALACE

07 May 1997

Dear Paul.

Having read Lynda Lee-Potter's column this morning, it is with great regret that I have no alternative but to withdraw my acceptance to attend the dinner to celebrate her 30 years at the Daily Mail.

I was very much looking forward to the evening, and indeed, it would have been so lovely to see you. However I do feel that with Lynda's continuous hostility towards me, it is now impossible for me to attend an evening in her honour.

I am deeply saddened to have to take this course of action, but I have no other choice.

Yours sincerely,

Diana.

Paul Dacre Esq

Lynda Lee-Potter

In early May 1997 Paul Dacre invited Princess Diana to a dinner at the Savoy to celebrate (*sic*) Lynda Lee Potter's 30 years with the *Daily Mail*. On 6 May she sent an acceptance.

Whoops! With impeccable timing, the very next day Lee Potter's column included a catty little item about Diana and her secretaries.

"Dear Paul," the princess wrote to Dacre. "Having read Lynda Lee Potter's column this morning, it is with great regret that I have no alternative but to withdraw my acceptance… I do feel that with Lynda's continuous hostility towards me, it is now impossible for me to attend an evening in her honour. I am *deeply* saddened to take this course of action, but I have no other choice."

Dacre replied that he quite understood her feelings. "I was away when the offending item appeared," he explained. "I always seem to be away when things like this happen!… For my part, however, I am absolutely determined that the *Mail* maintains the good relationship it has always enjoyed with you."

Peter McKay

On 21 August 1998, Mohamed Fayed sent Dacre a blistering letter complaining about the "heartless cruelty and utter hypocrisy" of *Mail* diarist Ephraim Hardcastle, aka Peter McHackey. "You should know the truth about Peter McKay," he raged, "a greedy and ungrateful wretch who habitually tells lies about me. When he edited *Punch* for me I gave him a generous salary of £180,000 a year [in 1996] only to be repaid by disloyalty and criticism behind my back… I gave McKay nine months and everything he asked to get *Punch* up and running. He gave me a turkey. He was a disastrous editor and his conduct was disgraceful. He drinks more than is good for him and bites the hand that feeds him. My dog has better manners. I tolerated his frequent wining and dining and entertaining at my expense. But you do not need me to tell you of his excesses on that score."

Indeed not. The Dacre dossier includes an irate memo from McKay in July 1997, complaining that the managing editor has been arbitrarily cutting his expenses. "This isn't acceptable," McKay fumes, "since it suggests – and presumably is meant to suggest – that they are lies… If you think that I spend too much on entertaining I'd like you to say so."

Attached to the memo are a week's worth of expenses claims, mostly lunches and dinners with important "contacts" and "sources". Almost all these guests turn out to be journalistic pals such as "informant Ms Sands" and "contact Ms McDonagh" (his old *Evening Standard* colleagues Sarah Sands and Melanie McDonagh), or "informant Simon Hoggart" (a lunch bill for £109.41, no mean feat in 1997).

A year later a memo from Lawrie Sear to Dacre notes that McKay's basic salary from the *Mail* in 1998 was £167,000. Is it any wonder the poor wee laddie couldn't afford his own meals?

Daniel Jeffreys

During the 1990s the *Eye* often drew attention to the flakiness of Daniel Jeffreys, a British freelance who wrote regular features for the *Mail* from New York. Two years ago he was eventually sacked after fabricating an eyewitness account of an execution in Georgia. But it transpires that the late Lord Rothermere had his doubts long before that. He was particularly enraged by Jeffreys' series of articles in 1998 warning old people to shun Viagra, human growth hormones and other elixirs which promise to "roll back the years".

"I see that you still employ that unbelievable bore Daniel Jeffreys," Rothermere wrote to Dacre on 29 May 1998. "I would like some humour rather than this anti-life stuff. It has inspired me to order a vast supply of Viagra to defy the little squirt."

It isn't clear if "the little squirt" refers to Jeffreys or to his lordship's failing powers. Either way, four months later the 73-year-old Rothermere had a massive, fatal heart attack, almost certainly provoked by that "vast supply of Viagra".

Conrad Black

In the fortnight after Princess Diana's death, *Daily Telegraph* editor Charles Moore ran a string of articles denouncing the *Daily Mail* for hounding the royals. Dacre and Lord Rothermere retaliated with equal ferocity, whereupon Conrad Black fired back at them. But then, quite suddenly, it was all over. Why?

The file obtained by Lord Gnome has a letter from Black to Rothermere dated 17 September 1997. "I am hoping," he writes, "that the editorial disagreement between our people will now subside or, at least, be conducted privately." A day later, Rothermere tells Black: "I am delighted that this editorial disagreement between us will now subside and I have asked my people [i.e. Dacre] to leave this matter alone in the hope that we shall not receive further outrageous attacks from Moore."

Not that all was sweetness and light. Conrad Black's olive-branch letter of 17 September accuses Rothermere of being, "in Leninist parlance, a 'useful idiot'." In reply, Rothermere informs Black that Charles Moore has "totally taken leave of his senses".

Jak

The former *Evening Standard* cartoonist Jak was well known as the greediest man in Fleet Street, a reputation fully confirmed by a memo dated 5 March 1998. Noting that the company car of *Mail* pundit Andrew Alexander (a Jaguar four-litre XJS convertible) is due for replacement, Lawrie Sear tells Dacre there is an alternative to shelling out £56,000 for a new one.

"We could ask Andrew if he wanted Jak's old car which is one year old and has done just 7,000 miles." How so? "The company owns a Mercedes 500SL which has both hard and soft tops and cost £82,000. It was evidently the cartoonist Jak's car but when it arrived he didn't like the colour so got a different one."

Andrew Alexander

On 9 October 1997, after receiving a complaint from Lord Rothermere about Alexander's neanderthal views, Dacre replies to his lordship: "I suspect that Andrew Alexander *is* a dinosaur but then I am pretty sure a great number of our readers are too." He adds this cryptic sentence: "As for Vague and Portillo (and Brown and Mandelson too for that matter) well, God help the family…" What can Dacre be implying about Messrs Hague and Brown?

Jonathan Cainer

Goblin-faced astrologer Jonathan Cainer has long been the best paid hack in Fleet Street. In 1998 the *Mail* gave him a basic salary of £87,000 but also half the proceeds from its horoscope phone-line. This, a memo from Sear to Dacre reveals, brought the star-gazer an extra £500,000 that year. Yes, *half a million quid*. Yet the file is full of complaints from Cainer that he ought to get more.

In 2000 he defected to the *Express*, where editor Rosie Boycott let him have all the phone-line income. He then accepted an even more lucrative offer from the *Mirror* before the *Mail* tried to lure him back a few weeks ago. His proposed new *Mail* deal is worth well over £1m a year, but on past form it can't be long before Sear and Dacre start receiving those old familiar demands for a pay rise.

Jonathan Holborow

In 1998 Peter Wright succeeded Jonathan Holborow as editor of the *Mail on Sunday* – and, soon after arriving, discovered that his predecessor had "made some very extravagant and disadvantageous commitments". In a memo to Dacre on 30 October 1998 he cites examples of this "lunacy". Dame Shirley Porter's adviser Roger Rosewell "is paid £80,000 just to come in two days a week to write a leader column and ghost the occasional feature". Freelance William Langley "is paid £500 per week simply to be available to write features, which are then paid for on top of that fee. He has written hardly anything". Tory political lobbyist Charles Lewington is paid £2,100 a month to provide "political and media industry intelligence, editorial and PR advice and the odd news story" – but, Wright observes, "so far he hasn't offered a single thought".

Dacre was as horrified as Wright. He wrote to the new Lord Rothermere detailing Holborow's appalling "cronyism". By then, however, Holborow had already banked the £1m pay-off he collected after his sacking. He was last heard of running a shop in Kent, and acting as part-time adviser to Richard "Dirty" Desmond on, er, "editorial integrity".

IN THE TEAROOM

"NEW" LABOUR seems to have lost its grip. It has lost its sure-footedness and sense of timing, too. Take Peter Mandelson's well-intentioned intervention designed to save the prime minister's political skin. How crass was that?

Tony Blair had almost wriggled free of the WMD fiasco and was poised to make a break across open ground. His job was no longer on the line. He'd struck a deal with his chancellor. The rebellion in his own party quieted, he was set to put the last painful months behind him and Move On. Then up pops Mandy. Result: the "ditch Tony" movement is back on the warpath and the PM's survival is once again moot in the tearoom.

Something similar is happening this week with Downing St's pisspoor response to shadow chancellor Oliver Letwin's cut-tax and-still-spend-like-Billy-O strategy. Some not very imaginative backroom squirt decided the smart way to sink Letwin was to leak part of the Gershon report showing that £15bn in waste had already been identified and the consequent savings allocated to improving schools and hospitals. Message: sorry Oliver, we've already spent your tax cuts on something more useful.

It's an old trick and Letwin saw it coming. The shadow chancellor belongs to a line of Conservative politicians who pose as eccentric boobies but are in fact fiendishly cunning – Lord Hailsham, Peter Brooke and Boris Johnson spring to mind. No one is more pleased than Letwin to have secured an admission that all these years Whitehall has been wasting shed-loads of our dosh. That means that between now and the election, every penny spent and every civil servant's job created under this government has to be justified before a sceptical public. Just what the Tories wanted. And never mind that the experts will say Letwin's sums don't add up. He's banking on the hope that even if they stick to the modest claim that two and two make four, no one will believe the government's maths either. And that's one calculation that probably is accurate.

'Quintus Slide'

THE KILLER question in the parliamentary debate on the Hutton report on 4 February – did Tony Blair know on 18 March last year, when MPs voted to go to war with Iraq, that the "45 minute" claim only referred to battlefield weapons, not long-range missiles? – was asked by Tory back bencher Richard Ottaway. [No I didn't, said the Dear Leader implausibly – even though it turned out that Geoff Hoon and Robin Cook certainly did.]

Ottaway is a member of the powerful Commons foreign affairs committee and is a former Conservative defence spokesman. He is also a former officer in the Royal Navy and the Royal Naval Reserve. The intelligence community are delighted by Ottaway. After all, they are hopping mad that Blair has unleashed Lord Butler to investigate possible "intelligence failings", while there is apparently to be no inquiry whatsoever into political failings in 10 Downing Street.

TONY BLAIR'S announcement of the formation of the Serious Organised Crime Agency (Soca), a 5,000-strong "FBI-style" national law enforcement outfit which will merge the National Crime Squad (NCS), the National Criminal Intelligence Service (NCIS) and the investigative arms of Customs & Excise and immigration, was one in the eye for Gordon Brown.

The Chancellor is fretting about Soca, partly because no one has yet properly worked out what it's going to cost. Furthermore, it will entail Gordon losing a small part of his empire – never a pleasant prospect. Unlike every other part of law enforcement, which belong to the Home Office, Customs & Excise come under the political control of the Treasury because of their historic role in gathering tax. But these days Customs has a big international law enforcement division... which is much resented by Inspector Knacker.

Eighteen months ago, when the formation of the new agency was first being discussed, Gordon refused to relinquish control of Customs. Since then, however, a series of botched investigations and collapsed court cases have tarnished Customs' image and strengthened the case for bringing it under Home Office control. Gordon fought a rearguard action, muttering that Customs investigators are better paid than their police counterparts. It wouldn't be on to cut their pay to the same level as that of the police in the new agency, so the pay of all the Knackers who joined Soca would have to be raised instead. That would not be prudent, grumbled Gordon – and it would fuel demands for better pay throughout the police force. But to no avail. On this occasion, Blair was determined to override all objections.

JOINED-UP GOVERNMENT

February 9: Home office announces creation of Serious Organised Crime Agency which will co-ordinate resources of police, Customs & Excise and immigration service in "one cohesive service".

February 11: National audit office (NAO) report reveals that Criminal Records Bureau is still incapable of accessing information from Customs & Excise and British Transport police after two years in operation.

"Dad, I've been given a conditional offer"

SERIAL Labour rebels could barely contain themselves on hearing of the latest edict to emanate from the Labour whips' office. Still smarting over the government's near-defeat over university top-up fees the chief whip, Hilary Armstrong, is threatening to cut off all assistance to constituencies represented by perennial malcontents such Jeremy Corbyn, Bob Marshall-Andrews and John McDonnell.

The punishment was not to stop with the withdrawal of the party chequebook – in future, the fiercesome Armstrong decided, rebel MPs and their constituencies would no longer receive morale-boosting ministerial visits! Since many Labour MPs and MEPs have already decided that the only chance of saving their seats at the next election is to eschew any publicity featuring the Dear Leader and produce their own leaflets instead, the threat of no more ministerial visits is seen as, er, no threat at all. In fact the absences of Messrs Reid, Blunkett, Straw *et al* is seen by many as a boon!

Number crunching

24% ■ proposed increase in EU spending that Gordon Brown objects will only "protect and shelter inefficiency"

40% ■ increase in Treasury's own administrative costs last year that officials were unable to explain to Commons committee

GOOD to know it is not just the home office which wastes taxpayers' money on needless bureaucracy. The department of health is good at it too.

After only two years the national care standards commission (NCSC), which replaced local and health authorities in inspecting and regulating care homes, is about to be abolished. In fact it was only one month after it had launched that the government announced it was to be shut down and merged with the social services inspectorate (SSI) and the audit commission.

Hence April sees the start of the new commission for social care inspection (CSCI), which has been putting much effort into creating its new brand and logo – a shield on a bracket. According to *Connect*, its newsletter, the shield represents a "defending force" and the bracket, er, expresses "an integrated system of social care, inspection and regulation".

Meanwhile, the new inflated national management structure has no fewer than six "business directors", and the regional and area managers from the old NCSC wonder if they'll have jobs as the new "business relationship managers", "provider relationship managers", "regulation inspectors" and "inspections managers". The *Eye* learns that there are even vacancies for "inspecting inspectors". And to think the cabinet had to set up a special unit to find out why so little money was reaching front line staff!

MALCOM RIFKIND is making much of his foreign policy and defence "expertise" as he tours Kensington & Chelsea, trying to wrap up the nomination as the borough's Conservative candidate to replace Michael Portillo.

Expertise, indeed. As defence secretary he tried to prevent the 1995 Srebrenica massacre, when the Serbs slaughtered 7,000 Bosnian muslim men and boys, by simply urging the Serbs to "be civilized". In 1992 he had dismissed Mrs Thatcher for talking "emotional nonsense" when she accurately predicted that appeasement in Bosnia would lead to genocide.

Slobodan Milosevic, now on trial in The Hague for war crimes, has even cited Rifkind's policy in his defence. The former Serbian dictator argues the British government gave him a "green light" to pursue the war.

RELIANCE Security, the firm set to do so well out of home secretary David Blunkett's tagging contracts (see last *Eye*), has put in a lot of effort keeping close to the home secretary.

At the last Labour party conference, Blunkett spoke at an Institute for Public Policy Research meeting paid for by Reliance Secure Task Management. The firm obviously expects to make money out of Blunkett's ID card proposal as well: an article by *Guardian* columnist David Aaronovitch claiming that ID cards were a thoroughly good thing and no threat to civil liberties was photocopied and distributed throughout Blunkett's Reliance-sponsored meeting.

TRUST the House of Lords to get to the bottom of what's *really* important in a new law. The Gender Recognition Bill, allowing transsexuals to have their new gender legally recognised, has been going through its Lords stages this month.

Peers have been greatly exercised by exactly how they would handle a change of sex by one of their number. For instance would an Earl become a Countess and if so would they have to apply to the Queen for the change in title? (Yes.)

Earl Ferrers was determined to demonstrate the absurdities of the new law by asking what would happen if the elder sister of a male heir were to become a man, thereby leapfrogging her brother to the title: "Does she then become Viscount Chump instead of her younger brother who, up till now, was Viscount Chump? If she does become Viscount Chump, does she inherit everything else? Does she inherit the title of earl instead of the proper Viscount Chump, and all the cash, if there is any? In my experience, earls do not have much cash nowadays, but they used to in the good old days. What happens to the proper Viscount Chump? There may be a trust fund under which it all goes to the holder of the earldom. Does the lady get that and, if so, will she remain friends with her brother?"

And so the Great Questions of the Day are subjected to forensic examination by their Lordships…

"May I call attention to the situation in..." *"May I call attention to myself..."*

FORMER lord chancellor Derry Irvine of expensive wallpaper fame is now working for a firm that is trying to squeeze £77m out of Gordon Brown.

He is a consultant to the Hutchison Whampoa Ltd group of companies whose main UK subsidiary, Hutchison 3G UK Ltd – better known as "3 Mobile" – is trying to claw back some of the money it paid to the treasury for a licence to operate "third generation" mobile phones.

Hutchison 3G and the other operators want a VAT refund on the huge cost of the licences. The treasury says that, as a public body, it did not charge VAT so it can't be refunded. So Irvine's firm has started legal proceedings.

Hutchison 3G needs the cash badly because "third generation" phones, which send pictures and movie clips, aren't earning nearly enough to cover the $4.4bn paid for their licence. The company's only other option is to try to increase phone sales by making porn available over the handset. Thus Hutchison 3G has launched a service called "Top Shelf" which, thanks to a deal with *Playboy* and Paul Raymond, means their phone users can see "slide shows and videos from *Playboy*, *Mayfair*, *Escort*, *Men Only*, *Club International* and *Men's World*" on their handsets.

ARMS TRADE NEWS

NOT all government ministers who visited India at the beginning of February got a glowing write-up from the government.

True, the government was keen to publicise the visit to Delhi of foreign secretary Jack Straw, home secretary David Blunkett and environment minister Elliott Morley. But arms minister Lord Bach, who was in India at precisely the same time to attend the Defexpo arms fair, didn't get a single press release – even though he was heading a large and high-powered military sales team.

While Straw praised "the statesmanship shown by [Indian] Prime Minister Vajpayee and by [Pakistani] President Musharraf" in defusing the "genuine risk" that their argument over Kashmir "could turn into a nuclear confrontation", Bach's team was anticipating better sales precisely because of the tension between the two countries. As the Defexpo statement said, the "increasing security concerns of a rapidly growing economy" were driving the Indian arms economy. The Kashmir issue is India's principle security concern.

The Indian cabinet has approved Britain's biggest arms sale to India, £800m worth of Hawk jets, but the deal has still not been signed. The foreign office told the *Eye* that Straw did not attend any events linked to Defexpo and it was not aware that he raised the Hawk sale in any talks. However, in his keynote speech about the visit Straw did say that the business interests of firms including BAE Systems and Rolls Royce were among the reasons "India is so important to Britain".

BRUSSELS SPROUTS

EUROSTAT isn't the only European body living under a shadow (*Eyes passim*). The Committee of the Regions (CoR) is having financial troubles too.

After its internal auditor Robert McCoy claimed the CoR was flouting basic financial rules, the European parliament's budgetary control committee sent the court of auditors to investigate. It found everything was just as it should be.

However, a report by the EU's crime investigation operation, Olaf, painted a very different picture. It revealed "systematic and flagrant incompetence" with respect to "the essential rules of tendering procedures and financial management". It recommended the opening of disciplinary procedure against two employees and it found that 222 staff members had made false claims for travel expenses.

To howls from some MEPs, the parliament passed the CoR's accounts anyway!

Down on the Fish Farm

THE SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE (SE) claims that fish farming supports employment for people from remote rural areas. That is, remote rural areas such as Romania, Lithuania, Estonia, Portugal, Spain, Italy, Iraq and China! When *Eye* 1081 exposed the huge numbers of immigrants employed in Scottish fish processing factories the industry's news sheet *IntraFish* said our statistics "have been universally questioned".

Not any more, they haven't, following the deaths by drowning of at least 20 Chinese cockle-collectors in Morecambe Bay. West Renfrewshire MP Jim Sheridan has now introduced a bill in Westminster to license the gangmasters who exploit immigrants. He alleges that he has found immigrants in Scottish fish processing plants being forced to work daily shifts of 12 hours, seven days a week, for less than £1 per day.

When the SE was challenged in October to substantiate industry employment figures and mount an independent inquiry, senior civil servant Gordon Hart said that the figure of 6,500 jobs was used as an "indicator" (*Eye* 1098). By January he had changed his tune, disclosing the existence of another report "completed in late 2003" that showed that salmon farming supported "in the region of 8,600 full-time jobs".

But SE fisheries minister Allan Wilson seems to disagree. On 19 January he said: "We estimate that including the suppliers, downstream processors and other service providers, over 10,000 jobs are now dependent on salmon farming in Scotland."

How many of these are actually "Scottish" jobs is another matter altogether.

'Old Trout'

Legal News

SO, oral evidence to the Saville Inquiry is over. More than six years after Tony Blair announced the investigation into the events of Bloody Sunday, the last of more than 900 witnesses – "PIRA 24" – gave his evidence in the Guildhall in Londonderry on 13 February.

"In theory an inquiry of the present kind could continue indefinitely in an attempt to follow up every possible lead," concluded Lord Saville, a sentiment which must have made the attendant lawyers, whose fees have already reached £70m, perk up. Regrettably, however, M'lud concluded: "In practice, however, the time has come when the tribunal has to draw a line."

That time, however, has not yet come. A four-month break is necessary before the lawyers for both sides will be able to give their closing summaries, while the inquiry's own lawyers will be incapable of summing up until October. Lord Saville and his colleagues promise to start writing up "towards the end of this year", and a final report is confidently expected at some point in 2005. The estimated cost of the inquiry is currently £155m – more than 15 times the sum originally budgeted for.

DOWN ON THE FARM

YOU have to feel sorry for the hopeless farming and fisheries minister Ben Bradshaw. After decades when cattle TB had been brought under control, it is now exploding. And what impales Ben firmly on the hook is that his department has convincing evidence that the cause of the epidemic – currently affecting 2,000 herds a year and rising fast – is to be found in the parallel explosion of TB in Britain's badger population, easily Europe's largest.

Currently the only available solution is a mass-cull of the badgers which are spreading the disease. But herein lies the problem: badgers rank even higher than foxes as Britain's most cherished wild mammal. Any government which dared launch a mass-slaughter of Mr Brock, our black-and-white furry friend who is best mates with Moley and Ratty, would provoke an outcry from the animal rights activists. And if it happened to be this government, no one would be quicker to object than the Political Animal Lobby which, as a front for the International Fund for Animal Welfare, helped Labour to power in 1997 with a £1m donation.

In that same year the Independent Scientific Review Group chaired by Sir John Krebs (then just humble Professor Krebs) was already claiming there was "strong evidence for an association between TB and badgers". Subsequent research has confirmed this. But in a desperate bid to postpone the day when it would have to start killing badgers on a countrywide scale, the government spun things out with a series of experimental culls, the so-called "Krebs trials".

These were so clumsily planned that, according to experts such as Professor Stephen Harris of Bristol University, they ended up spreading the disease because badgers which escaped the traps fled into other, previously uninfected areas.

So terrified is Defra to grasp the nettle that it is now relying on a further series of "Krebs trials". The odd thing is that, although ministers are paralysed by the thought of killing thousands of infected badgers (numbers have more than trebled in 20 years), the same politicians seem to have no compunction in killing tens of thousands of infected cattle (any more than they had in killing millions of farm animals during foot-and-mouth).

The real answer, of course, as with foot-and-mouth, is that the cattle should be vaccinated (which was how TB was all but eliminated from the human population). But for ten years MAFF/Defra has been promising it would have a vaccine in "ten years' time". After spending £8m on research, it is still saying the same today. Meanwhile the total bill for TB is predicted to rise by 2010 to £250m.

'Muckspreader'

FIVE TV

Dunkirk (BBC2)
Ancestors (BBC2)

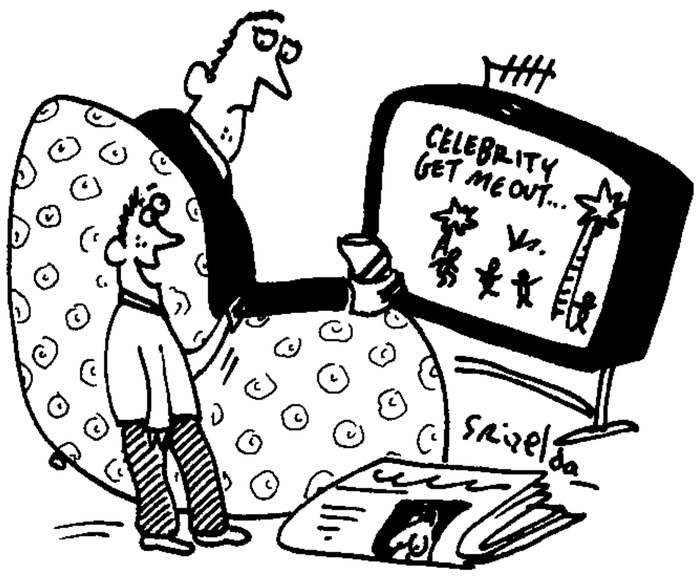
THREE years ago, the official smart remark at television seminars was that history had gone back to basics. After years of experimenting with game-show formats and lavish dramatisations, now it was just a man (Simon Schama, David Starkey) speaking to camera, like AJP Taylor back in the Sixties.

Fashions last no longer in television than on the catwalk, so it was inevitable that that view would become history. Schama, having used up the whole of British history, is now working on a series about art.

At first, no one was sure if the replacement for these epic illustrated lectures would be historical dramas or documentaries. With Charles II last year, the BBC commissioned both fictional and factual versions and ran them simultaneously. The problem was that a viewer needed to watch both strands. If you just watched the one with Rufus Sewell rushing round shagging in a wig, you were getting a skewed view, with no Schama or Starkey to pop up and say: "There are three versions of what happened next."

Dunkirk, a three-parter about how Britain almost lost its army – and the war – in France in 1940, suggests that the new fashion in historical programming is for shows which combine dusty old memos with freshly-typed dialogue; getting it right *and* making it up. Although all the participants are actors, all the characters are historical figures. This is obvious in the case of Simon Russell Beale's Winston Churchill, but applies equally to Phil Cornwell's Private Alf Tombs, a Dunkirk participant whose contribution has been reconstructed from interviews, diaries and reports. To add to the smack of accuracy, all the action, whether involving Churchill in cabinet or Tombs in a commandeered chateau, is filmed in the style of a modern documentary, a hand-held camera trotting alongside the evacuated troops, pushing into the face of Churchill as Russell Beale quivers his lips at the cowardice of Halifax.

This approach has the double advantage of making the footage seem more immediate while never allowing the possibility that it is real. A logical device might have been to recreate the action in the style of a 1940s newsreel but these days that would give editorial managers the heebee-jeebees, because a viewer might confuse the scenes with actual period footage.



"Daddy, what did you do during the post-war period?"

In *Dunkirk*, everything is carefully labelled. The archive film is clearly real, while the modern visual grammar of the dramatisations make clear that they are mediated. To ensure that there is no doubt at all about provenance, Timothy Dalton reads, like an impersonation of Laurence Olivier impersonating Sean Connery, a long, sonorous commentary making clear the sources which provide the basis for every story we see.

What *Dunkirk* shows is that two current fears of producers – that historical drama is too dubious while historical documentary is too dull – have encouraged a hybrid form in which the two genres exist within the same programme. *Dunkirk* has the additional sandbagging of allowing digital viewers to switch over at the end and watch special add-on documentaries in which the real military veterans who were the source material are interviewed.

There's almost certainly going to be a lot more of this. It's right to assume that post-Hutton paranoia will most seriously affect BBC news and current affairs, but the caution instilled by the report will also hit the history department because this is the other branch of television apart from journalism in which facts and interpretations are most likely to be challenged.

Ancestors, another new BBC2 history series, already shows signs of this rather lawyerly approach to the story of the past. Outwardly, it's more in the style of the Schama/Starkey lantern-lectures with one bloke – archaeologist Nick Slope – trying to recreate a story from the past: in this case, the Battle of the Nile 204 years ago. Slope, though, lacks the theatrical swagger of the two modern fathers of television history and is so concerned to establish every document and personal memoir he's drawing on that you feel he's arguing with a possible objector off-screen. And that series, like *Dunkirk*, was made before Hutton. Imagine what it's going to be like now.

'Remote Controller'

MEDIA NEWS

IN AN internal memo, BBC head of news Richard Sambrook shows his keenness to write off the whole dossier fiasco as an individual eccentricity, rather like the *Sunday Times* and the Hitler Diaries, CNN and the Tailwind investigation, the *New York Times* and Jayson Blair. It was Andrew Gilligan's fault.

But in truth nobody is being left off the hook (apart from Sambrook himself, who decided to keep his own job). BBC bosses claim that restoring confidence among staff is a priority.

But endless forums for hacks are now being prepared "to establish clearly what we stand for and how we demonstrate it on air", despite the fact, says Sambrook, that "journalists often resist that kind of discussion".

In future, resistance to "open mindedness and self questioning" will be futile.

JUST WHEN BBC staff thought things could get no worse at the corporation an email arrives from the "Development Adviser, Factual and Learning" detailing the latest events in Greg Dyke's greatest legacy, the "Making It Happen Commitment to developing our staff." A series of "workouts" run by something called the "Mind Gym" aim to "make learning about ways to be creative both stimulating and fun".

The sessions – sorry, workouts – have titles like "Generating Creative Sparks" and "Hare Brain Tortoise Mind", and will apparently include "asking yourself, how would Britney Spears solve global warming or George W Bush sell a new brand of crisps?"

CHANNEL 4's documentary on the death of Princess Diana, broadcast on 5 February, aimed to lay the conspiracy theories to rest once and for all.

"Recent polls have indicated that 27 percent of the population … believe Diana was murdered", producer Martyn Gregory told viewers at the programme's outset, before spending an hour forensically dismantling every single suspicious circumstance and laying any blame firmly at the door of the Fayed family.

So convincing was his case that in a telephone poll conducted by Channel 4 after the programme, the number of viewers convinced that Diana was murdered had gone up to… 78 percent!

HATS OFF to schedulers at ITV, who moved ITN's *News At Ten* to its present 10.30 slot in order to save it from a continuing ratings decline. Early indications indeed suggested that audiences were on the up – even beating the BBC's Ten.

But last week everything changed. A million viewers vanished into thin air. The reason? The end of *I'm A Celebrity, Get Me Out Of Here* – the only reason why anyone was tuning in.

D·I·Y
YOU FIND SOME RUNDOWN OLD HOUSE...
THAT'S HAD ITS INSIDES KNOCKED OUT...
YOU GIVE AN ESTIMATE...
"WHO did that?
You did!
THEN SMARTEN IT UP A BIT AND MAKE A FORTUNE
Greg Dyke £500,000 book deal with Rupert Murdoch
Ken Pyne

SILLY tidings from Broadcasting House, which is undergoing massive redevelopment to house top executives and make the studios see-through in the name of public access.

Covering the scaffolding outside is a 50ft-high photograph of the old BBC Radio sound effects room, full of old telephones, gravel trays and coconut shells – a quirky part of old-fashioned radio production.

In reality the sound effects store has been ripped out and programme makers can't get practical sound effects anywhere in the building. When one recent production needed the sound of footsteps on gravel, a resourceful studio manager had to ferret around by the lifts and nick some pebbles from a decorative plant pot.

CHANNEL 4 staff may have good reason to be nervous of their new chairman: Luke (son of Paul) Johnson has form.

As *The Publican* trade paper reported, three years ago Johnson was embroiled in a clash with Tim Martin, chairman of the pub owner J.D. Wetherspoon, over how to treat the workers. Martin risked disapproval from his shareholders and City analysts when he introduced a 48-hour week for pub managers, a bonus scheme and higher staff wages. He said: "It cost us £15m and took 3 percent off our turnover. People don't like that but it has paid off since."

Johnson, who built up Pizza Express, was at the time founder and chairman of the beer and mussels chain, Belgo. Gamely, he agreed to work in its flagship restaurant, Belgo Central, in Covent Gardena for the BBC programme *Back to the Floor*, saying: "If you spend too much of your time dealing with spreadsheets and in board meetings, you lose touch with what the day-to-day realities are like. I think it will be healthy to see it from the point of view of waiters and dishwashers."

Alas, after a few hours in the kitchen, Johnson famously tore off his microphone and walked out, telling the BBC: "You can shove your programme right up there." It seems there had been a disagreement with kitchen staff who had told him Belgo had a bad name among other chefs and kitchen workers and had called for better wages and conditions. One of them said his wage was only £5.10p an hour.

A clue to Johnson's real concerns came when he told fellow directors: "Investors are very impatient. They are not interested in next year or the year after – they want profits now. If you pay people more, you make less profit. Shares go higher because you make profits."

As *The Publican* pointed out, Belgo's share price actually fell from a high point of 12p in the summer of 1998 to 3.25p in December 2000 while Wetherspoon had "bucked the trend in the pub industry" by seeing its price rise from 147.5p in 1998 to 340p.

Those at Channel 4 who can't stand the heat had better get ready to flee the kitchen...

OBN SPECIAL

"Greg made the place fun – he made everything seem possible. What will happen now?"

"...but Greg was so colourful and now everything feels grey again. Will the men in grey suits be back?"

— Questions submitted by staff to the BBC executive committee "at this difficult time".

HAVE YOU heard about "the biggest event in digital television since the debut of Freeview"? Unlikely, unless you're a *Daily Express* reader.

While coverage of Top Up TV, a new pay-per-view service, has been muted in most quarters, the *Express* titles have taken every opportunity to sing its praises. Why the enthusiasm? The clue lies in the line: "It will also give optional access to Television X – the Fantasy Channel." This of course is Abi Titmuss's new employer, the channel so loved by one-handed satellite viewers, and the cash-cow of *Express* owner, pornographer Richard Desmond, which currently relies upon BSkyB for both a platform and the billing services which pull in £3.99 per night per viewer. Television X is only guaranteed its place on satellite for as long as new boy James Murdoch puts up with it. Should he decide to clean up Sky's act and dispense with its sleazier services (or more likely, launch adult channels of his own rather than just rent space to other people's), an alternative platform will be a necessity.

Sadly for Desmond the BBC, the dominant partner in Freeview, has declined to list the Top Up services alongside its own free-to-air channels, but instead decided to bundle them in a special pay section at the end of the electronic programme guide.

Top Up have now reported the BBC to Ofcom for this supposedly unfair treatment in the hope of another humiliating post-Hutton climbdown by the corporation. Expect a redoubling of the *Express*'s "Don't pay the licence fee" campaign while the watchdog considers its decision.

JOINED-UP GOVERNMENT

SEPTEMBER 2003 — Culture minister Estelle Morris tells the film industry: "The evidence is that the tax credit has done what it was meant to do. It was a sound investment and it has proved its worth... I think the credit has got to continue. Films about British culture won't be made unless Britain makes them."

FEBRUARY 2004 — The Inland Revenue ends tax relief to film companies arguing that too many tax avoidance funds are investing in UK films. Around 25 movies about to start shooting in the UK face cancellation or delay while extra funding is found.

[redacted]
SENSATIONS, LINCOLN'S BEST massage for gentlemen. Come and visit us in discreet surroundings.
Lincoln Target

AD NAUSEAM

IS IT really a good idea for new communications regulator Ofcom to offload responsibility for all advertising to the Advertising Standards Authority?

The ASA has often been toothless when it comes to stopping advertisers doing what they want. Perhaps Ofcom's chief executive Stephen Carter (formerly of J. Walter Thompson) has forgotten that truism about all publicity being good publicity. Recent campaigns for Barnardo's, FCUK and Opium have shown that so-called bad publicity is also free publicity; and it's often actively courted rather than feared.

The ASA, licking its lips at the proposed changes and extra funds they will bring, claims a one-stop shop will make complaining simpler. But isn't giving all advertising regulation to the advertisers, using a code they have themselves written, what Ofcom is supposed to be guarding against.

DUMB BRITAIN

The Weakest Link, BBC2

Anne Robinson: The 19th-century novel by the Russian author Dostoevsky is *Crime And...* what?
Contestant: Prejudice.
Robinson: Kate Hudson is the daughter of which famous American movie actress?
Contestant: Rock.

Magic FM 105.4

Graham Dene: What was the name of Tony Blair's chief spin-doctor who resigned last year?
Contestant: Iain Duncan Smith.

Ken Bruce's Popmaster quiz, Radio 2

Ken Bruce: The brothers Derek and Alan Longmuir were members of which famous boy band of the 70s?
Contestant: The Osmonds?
Ken Bruce: Noooo, they tended to be called Osmond, as a rule.

LUVVIES

"I would *love* to get everybody in the world thinking the same thing just for one second. I bet you something mental would happen. Even if we all just thought 'cup of tea'."

JAMES McAVOY
Scotland on Sunday

Submitted by George Millar.

An occasional column devoted to gems from the acting profession. £10 paid for entries.

SUPERMODELS

KERBER

LONDON FASHION WEEK
THIS LONDON FASHION WEEK HAS A CERTAIN "RETRO" FEEL...
...THE THEME IS "THE SAME OLD RUBBISH AGAIN"
GOD THAT'S LIKE SOOOO RETRO!!!
FASHION BLURB
ORGANIZER
ORGANIZER!

DOING THE ROUNDS

WHILE health secretary John "Oh fuck not health" Reid locks horns with Sir Ian Kennedy, chair of the commission for healthcare audit and inspection, over "new" Labour's absurdly simplistic star ratings (Reid wants to keep them, Kennedy wants them replaced with "intelligent information"), the pressure on NHS trusts to get and retain their three-star status is immense. Only then can you apply for entry into the privileged "foundation hospital club".

Last year an East Anglian trust hit eight of the nine key targets, earning two stars. This year, it's focusing hard on all three – so hard that an orthopaedic consultant was ordered back from his holiday to do a disc investigation on a man with back pain in time to hit the waiting time target. But chasing the stars isn't necessarily good for patients, as one GP points out to the *Eye*.

"At 11.30pm I was called out to a patient in severe pain who had just been discharged straight home from the intensive care unit (ITU) of a three-star Suffolk hospital. He was admitted for the routine removal of a tibial nail but collapsed on the table, the operation was abandoned and he was sent to ITU. He had bronchospasm, rapid atrial fibrillation and his blood pressure and diabetes were out of control, but there were no orthopaedic beds. So he was sent home in pain, without all his medication as the hospital pharmacy was shut.

"I phoned the ITU consultant to inquire why he was sent home, why we were not informed and what I was supposed to do about his pain. An opiate injection was out because his blood pressure was unstable. He suggested a trial of non-steroidal drugs, but they can cause bronchospasm and the last bout left him ventilated for 36 hours. So I sent him back in." Thus far, the unfortunate patient has jeopardised the targets for cancelled operations and emergency readmission following discharge.

"He was finally admitted to an orthopaedic bed, and sent home again on oral morphine after having his blood pressure monitored overnight. There was still no communication from the hospital, no follow-up or plan or diagnosis of cause of pain or collapse, and he still didn't have all of his drugs."

GPs often get dumped with this scenario, despite the explicit instructions in the General Medical Council: "If you do not tell the general practitioner the results of investigations, treatment and any other information necessary for the continuing care of the patient, you will be responsible for providing or arranging all necessary after care until another doctor agrees to take over." Alas, good communication between hospital and GP isn't a star target, so it gets sidelined.

In the end the patient was discharged with an illegibly written opiate prescription, which the GP tried to decipher but was unable to contact a junior doctor. He did, however, speak to an orthopaedic consultant who assured him the patient would be seen at a clinic the following morning. Alas, when the patient phoned the consultant's secretary, he was told no appointment had been made, so the GP had to contact the consultant again to sort out the mess. "At the appointment, the patient overheard another consultant say 'Oh for god's sake, I don't want to see this loser. He's just a mess. Send in the registrar.'

"The ITU consultant has since phoned to apologise about the initial discharge: they had to clear his ITU bed for an emergency and the orthopaedic and medical wards were full, so my patient got sent straight home. The official line from ITU is treatment is now so good that many patients can be discharged straight home. But no one has discussed this policy with the local GPs, or provided the evidence to support it."

Another source on ITU may have been closer to the truth: "We can't close to admissions when we're full, as the cancelled surgery would lose us a star." So patients are discharged before they're ready to free up beds.

M.D

off your trolley

REEVE & WAY

ACCORDING TO YOUR MEDICAL NOTES...
WAIT A MINUTE, THEY'RE NOT MY NOTES, THEY'RE SOMEONE ELSE'S
NONSENSE, THIS IS AN EFFICIENT HOSPITAL. WE FILE PAINSTAKINGLY, WE ARE CAREFUL WITH PATIENT RECORDS. I ASSURE YOU...
WE DON'T MIX UP PEOPLE'S NOTES, MRS HENDERSON

SIGNAL FAILURES

Laughing stock strategy

THE damning report of the national audit office (NAO) on the private rolling stock companies is the starkest illustration yet of why the "strategic" rail authority (SRA) is nothing of the sort.

In December SRA bureaucrats published a new rolling stock strategy which was almost identical to the old system (which itself was hurriedly cobbled together by the Tories). "The private sector has brought clear benefits to the procurement, delivery and maintenance of rolling stock," gushed SRA boss Richard Bowker. "It is not appropriate for the SRA to meddle where the market does a better job."

Whoops! Less than two months later the NAO painted a different picture in its report on new trains (which, incidentally, didn't examine the huge profits rolling-stock companies make from rip-off charges for older trains – *Eyes passim*). Left to Bowker's beloved "market", the NAO said introduction of new trains had been hampered by "lack of organisational coherence within the rail industry". Many trains were less reliable than the ones they replaced and most were late into service.

"We did not identify any evidence of the SRA exploiting its strategic position in the industry to identify and disseminate best practice in the introduction of new trains," said the NAO, supported by 86 percent of the train-operating companies (TOCs) surveyed.

Oddly enough where the NAO did find evidence of SRA intervention was in the Stagecoach-Virgin empire (Stagecoach half-owns Virgin Rail, which Bowker used to co-chair). "SRA told us that, as part of additional subsidies to stabilise the TOCs' finances, it is paying Virgin Trains' CrossCountry and West Coast TOCs some £270m over the period 2003 to 2005 to off-set costs incurred due to the delayed introduction of new trains on the west coast mainline. The SRA has paid, or has a commitment to pay, additional subsidies of some £760m to four TOCs to offset additional costs associated with the introduction of new trains."

Besides Virgin's bailout, the SRA had organised a £174m payment over three years to Stagecoach's South West Trains for train introduction. Such largesse didn't stop the SRA solemnly pledging in its strategy to "preserve the benefits of... private risk taking".

The SRA boasts that the private sector has procured 4,500 new carriages, implying the public sector would be incapable of such a feat. But the total of new trains in the first 10 years of privatisation is only 11 percent higher than in the 10 years before privatisation – when British Rail was deliberately hamstrung by Margaret Thatcher's anti-public rail policies.

The upheaval of privatisation blocked thousands of planned carriages to replace slam-door trains by the original 1998 safety deadline. Now there's a rush to meet the latest deadline (end of 2004); but the NAO says this feast and famine only exacerbates problems: "The paucity of orders for new trains in the two to three years leading up to privatisation in 1996 contributed to a shortage of manufacturing and managerial expertise within the UK railway industry. When this was followed by a surge in orders... there was insufficient expertise to deliver the orders on time."

The SRA's take on the same problem is: "It would not constitute value for money for the SRA to artificially maintain a smooth stream of new rolling stock orders."

The NAO made nine recommendations for the SRA to be more proactive. Thus it's left to bodies like the NAO to be strategic while the "strategic" rail authority is busy trying to justify the status quo and appease the City at any price.

'Dr B. Ching'

ROTTEN BOROUGHS

UNREALITY TV

TORY Hertsmere borough council, which "saved" Elstree Studios in Hertfordshire by buying the freehold from Brent Walker in 1996, is now short of at least £300,000 as the film and TV studios – home of *Big Brother* and *Who Wants to be a Millionaire?* – has failed to pay a "substantial" chunk of its rent.

The council has asked m'learned friends to pursue the missing dosh, which relates to "turnover related rent and other outstanding debts", according to the minutes of a closed session of the council's executive on 4 February. Meanwhile the audit commission has opened a file on the cosy relationship between Elstree Studios and the council.

In better days films from *The Dam Busters* to *The Shining* and parts of the *Indiana Jones* and *Star Wars* movies were made at Elstree, but it had ceased to function as a studio by the early 1990s. Previous owner Brent Walker flogged off much of the site to Tesco for redevelopment and three huge sound stages were lost. Since Hertsmere took over there has been a revival of activity, with the council boasting that hundreds of jobs have been created and millions of pounds invested. But most of the jobs are with already existing independent production companies and services, and what the council has to show for its considerable investment of taxpayers' money is increasingly unclear.

The studios are managed by a company called Elstree Film and Television Studios Ltd (EFTS), set up by the council and headed by Neville Reid, formerly Hertsmere council's head of property services. The council is keen to grant EFTS a new 25-year lease when the current one runs out in 2007. Other media companies interested in taking over the lease have been given the cold shoulder by the council, and the press and public are generally excluded from council meetings at which Elstree Studios matters are discussed. What a carry on!

PS One of EFTS's directors is Rod Brewster, editor of the local *Borehamwood Times* newspaper. Curiously, the paper decided that the best story to come out the council meeting at which the Studios' debts were discussed was a proposal to set up a nappy recycling scheme. Of the financial goings on at the Studios there was not a word.

● HATS OFF to councillors on the very important Mayor's Car Working Party in Poole, Dorset. The four-year-old Volvo saloon into which Mayor Ray Smith, Sheriff Les Burden and their wives are forced to squeeze on their way to official functions is clearly not sufficiently spacious. A £64,000 stretch limo, it is thought, might be more the ticket. But how to pay for it? Obviously it was out of the question to forgo a 29 percent increase in allowances for councillors, introduced as one of the Tories' top priorities on taking control last year, even though the £100,000 it costs annually could buy several nice motors. Fortunately there are other less painful options under consideration – such as closing down the town's mobile library service. Parp! Parp!

PIPE DREAMS

ON 28 JANUARY a soft-centred piece eulogising Hackney's elected mayor Jules Pipe appeared in the *Grauniad*'s "Society" section. "Every inch a moderniser in New Labour mould", David Walker noted approvingly, Pipe (a former *Sunday Telegraph* sub-editor) was a "technocrat" who was "willing to make hard choices, shutting a swimming pool here, suspending a service there…"

A week later a *Grauniad* news report spelled out in more detail what that airy reference to shutting a swimming pool here and there means. It told the story of the disastrous £31m Clissold leisure centre in Stoke Newington, commissioned by a previous Labour regime in 1995, which closed before Christmas on safety grounds after being open for less than two years. The centre, praised for its "functional modernism", alas does not function. The roof leaks, walls have cracked and the electrics are unsafe. It is at least £24m over budget, perhaps much more than that, and there are fears that it may never reopen.

What the *Grauniad* failed to mention was that Hackney is now an entirely swim-free zone, as the borough's other three pools are all closed, too. Haggerston pool was forced to shut in 2000 thanks to the overspend at the Clissold, while the Britannia and Kings Hall pools are closed because of leaking boilers. At Kings Hall escaping steam led to the ceiling falling in, and condensation dripped into the air-conditioning system, causing it to short-circuit and shut down. Prior to the pool's closure before Christmas, staff had had no cleaning materials for six months and resorted to using water from the pool and soap from hand dispensers to scrub the tiles.

In best "new" Labour style a private company, Leisure Connections, runs Hackney's leisure services – aka "working in partnership". The contract, however, lacks any penalty clauses, thanks to an oversight by the council's legal department, so Leisure Connections receives £1.5m a year whether or not the borough has any usable public swimming pools.

But never mind. Hackney's high-and-dry swimmers, like the rest of its voters, surely accept that "hard choices" have to be made. And, looking on the bright side, should London's bid to host the Olympics succeed, there'll be a splendid new pool in neighbouring Newham in only eight years' time!

SPARRING PARTNERS

THE long-running saga of delays and cock-ups associated with the Bath Spa project (*Eyes passim*) is clearly causing emotional turmoil to some of those involved. Bath and Northeast Somerset (Banes) council's arts supremo, Cllr Nicole O'Flaherty, for instance, has taken to screaming abuse at her opponents in pubs.

Spying mild-mannered local classical music promoter Tom Clarke, a long-standing critic of her policies, in a city centre hostelry, Cllr O'Flaherty made a beeline for his table and loudly called him "a bloody big bastard" some four times while thumping the table, before being manoeuvred away by Clarke to a group of fellow Lib-Dem councillors. The apparent reason for O'Flaherty's outburst was a number of pamphlets and letters to the local paper written by Clarke, criticising her £32,000 "arts strategy" report.

Banes had already cut its grant to Clarke's Bath Artists' Recital Trust, which arranges young musicians' concerts in the Pump Room, from £15,000 to £1,500 a year. Following the pub fracas, the council's solicitor, Vernon Hitchman, has written to Clarke accusing him of "harassing" Cllr O'Flaherty and requesting that he no longer speak or write to her. This has baffled Clarke, who says he has only written to the councillor twice in two years. And independent witnesses who were in the pub confirm that it was O'Flaherty – who is considerably larger than the arthritic Clarke – who was doing the intimidating. But any criticism of councillors, it seems, is no longer permitted in Bath.

● SO FAREWELL, then, Gholam Murtaza, the Labour councillor in Rochdale who was not qualified for office by virtue of having served a jail sentence for attacking two female detectives with a kitchen knife, yet for months refused to resign. Shortly after *Eye* 1097 reported on the affair, Murtaza finally did the decent thing. The fact that he had resisted calls to quit since last August, however, means there is now no time to hold a by-election before the council elections in June. So the people of Middleton west ward will have to do without a councillor for six months. Labour also loses its majority of one on the council – a fact which can of course have had no influence on Murtaza's attempts to cling to office.

LEVELLING THE PLAYING FIELDS

MORE tales reach the *Eye* of public outdoor playing spaces under threat from rampant development.

In **Nottingham**, West Bridgford's public tennis courts, bowling green and pavilion are about to be swallowed by a new council-run car park near a giant new Marks & Spencer's. Last month local campaigners filed papers with the high court in a final attempt to save the facilities.

M&S, many of whose shoppers will no doubt use the new car park, is contributing £100,000 to the cost of laying an extra 60 council parking spaces where the sports facilities currently are, rather than using up any of the precious £3m site where its store is to be built.

When Bridgford Park was given to West Bridgford UDC in 1923 by local businessman Albert Heymann, the council recorded in its minutes that the acquisition was "the finest achievement the council has ever undertaken", thanking the Heymann family for "their public-spirited action, which will confer an inestimable benefit on the inhabitants of this district for all time". One wonders how their colleagues on modern-day Rushcliffe borough council will record the destruction of the site.

Meanwhile in **Huddersfield**, lawyers are hunting for the paperwork to prove that a playing field was left to the council only on condition that it stayed in recreational use. A local textile firm is looking to expand onto the Mirfield playing fields which were given to the town in 1970 by the Community of the Resurrection organisation.

No planning permission has yet been requested from Kirklees council but that hasn't stopped campaigners flooding the town hall with letters pleading that the outdoor space should remain public.

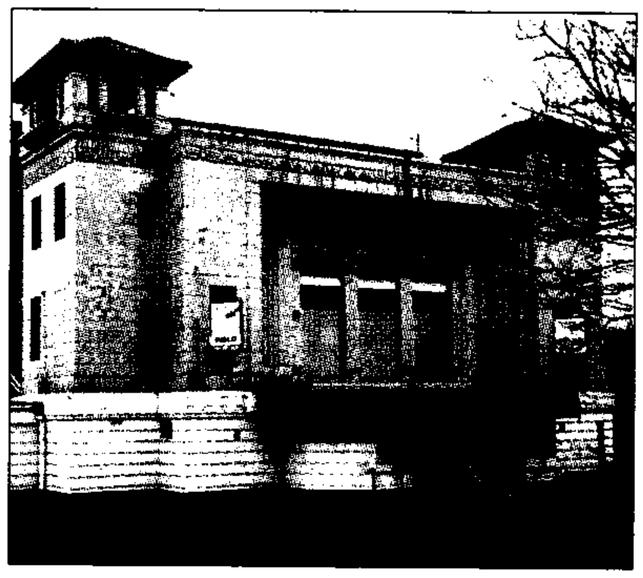
IT'S GRIM UP NORTH LONDON — KNIFE & PACKER

I GOT HERE AS QUICKLY AS I COULD! YOU SAID YOU HAD A CALAMITOUS PEST INFESTATION...
WHAT IS IT? RATS, MICE, WOODLICE?
THERE'S A GREENFLY ON THE BONSAI!
IT COULD DECIMATE THE ENTIRE PLANTATION

NOOKS and CORNERS

THE Ambassador Cinema in Salford was the first "Super Cinema" to be created in Britain outside London. Designed by John Knight and built in 1928, it has a striking ceramic exterior in the Spanish Colonial style and had a richly decorated auditorium.

In the 1960s the Ambassador was converted into a bingo hall. It was closed in 1995 by its owner, Rank Mecca, who proposed to sell the building to Kelly Homes. Salford council then obligingly gave planning permission for the cinema to be replaced by a block of flats. This provoked considerable opposition and the Ambassador Project was set up to acquire and restore the building as a community centre.



When an application was made to list the Ambassador (in 2000, English Heritage published a report on the need for the further protection of historic cinemas and proposed listing four in the Manchester area), the Department of Culture, Media 'n' Sport listed it at grade II.

So far, so good. But Rank Mecca was unhappy and appealed. Ever anxious to oblige, in August 2001 the DCMS decided it had made a mistake and would "de-list" the Ambassador on the ground that few original internal fittings survive. English Heritage also ended up with egg on its face. For while its north-west office encouraged the listing, the de-listing was supported by a report from the London headquarters which concluded that alterations made to the interior in 1993 had reduced its architectural interest.

This is hotly disputed by the Ambassador Project, which points out that this mischievous report admits that "the core fabric and decoration appears to survive intact, and the later interventions are those made in many cinemas, including listed ones, to facilitate ongoing use".

But the damage was done. Kelly Homes' Mr Kevin Kelly re-emerged to grab his planning permission for flats and bought the cinema for £150,000. After a while he decided not to go ahead and sold the building to McDermott Developments of Burnley for £750,000. This company seems intent on demolishing the cinema as soon as possible – although it might be prepared to sell it for £1.8m.

So, thanks to gratuitous de-listing, there has been a 1,200 percent increase in market value of an eminently reusable and interesting building in just a few years. But it's of no benefit to Salford. Could the heritage lottery fund, which has now withdrawn its £15m grant to Brighton's poor old West Pier (*Eyes passim*), not spend a small proportion of the money saved and help Salford rescue a fine cinema?

ONE of the more horrible thoroughfares in the City of London is Farringdon Street, with its series of mediocre commercial buildings erected over the last half-century. The only attractive part left is just north of the Holborn Viaduct where the curved extremities of the Smithfield General Market buildings abut the east side.

These ebullient Free Renaissance structures in red brick and stone were built in 1879, the work of the prolific and portly Sir Horace Jones, architect and surveyor to the City of London. But if the Corporation of London now has its way and pursues a cosy deal with Thornfield Properties, these will soon be replaced by a 10-storey office block, making the dreariness of Farringdon Street complete.

The City never gives up. Forty years ago it wanted to demolish Jones's nearby magnificent masonry and cast-iron Smithfield Meat Market – now listed Grade II*. Jones's Leadenhall Market, that enjoyable network of covered streets and shops behind Lloyd's, was also threatened. More recently it tried to get rid of Billingsgate Fish Market, again by Jones, but that also survives, if altered internally, thanks in particular to SAVE Britain's Heritage. Now the corporation is going to have a go at getting rid of the General Market buildings it has neglected for years, encouraged by their not being listed, although they are within the Smithfield conservation area.

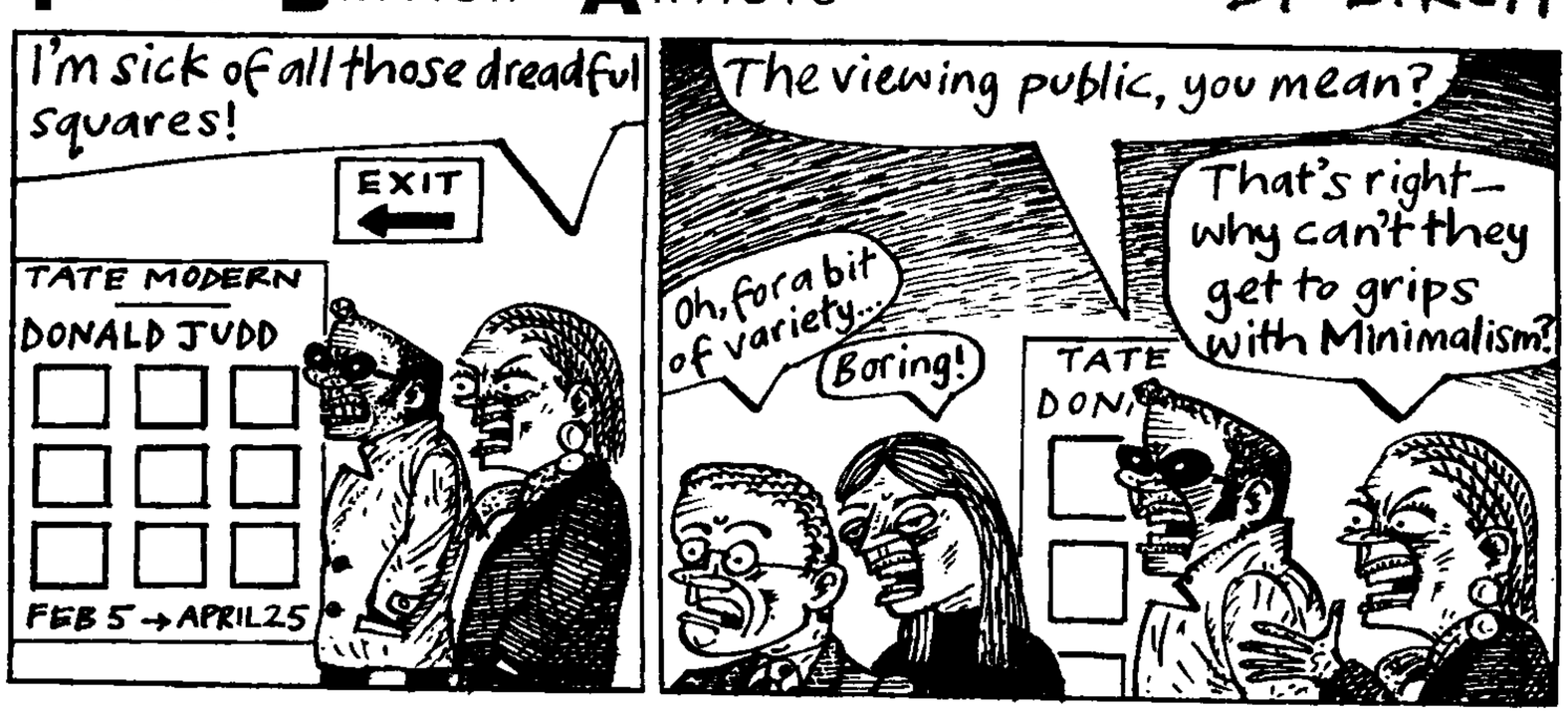
Jones's structures are not great architecture but so what? They are vulgar and somewhat confused but – like Jones's baronial towers on preposterous Tower Bridge – they are congenial and lovable. More to the point, a report by Urban Space Management commissioned by the corporation shows that the General Market buildings – including a cold store and fish market – could be converted and reused, possibly as a market.

When restored and let, 19th century market buildings can be the catalyst for urban regeneration – look at Covent Garden. Since the dark days when the Meat Market was threatened, Smithfield has been enjoyably transformed with a lively mixture of shops, restaurants and bars. That process could be taken further in the General Market. Naturally one cannot expect the City corporation to respect the fact that there has been a market in Smithfield for a mere 1,000 years or so; but if it was not so obsessed by the imperative of property development, it might realise the City of London needs pleasant places for its daily inhabitants as well as yet more lettable office space. It should think again.

'Piloti'

YOUNG BRITISH ARTISTS

BY BIRCH



Pseuds Corner

I have a great intellectual capacity that fashion does not always need.

VIVIENNE WESTWOOD
***Sunday Times* Style Section**

From the start I strove to overcome the impersonality of large scale capitalist commodity production by putting into my drawings an intensity of passion that would make each printed copy of the Beano personal to the child that held it.

Beano artist LEO BAXENDALE on 50 years of Minnie, Plum and the Bash Street Kids

As opposed to the standard model of time travellers projected into previously lived cultural patterns, what do you make of the concept 'collective experience of temporal variation', such as stalled, recursive, or redundant sequences of year sets? I am thinking of collective delusion or the social construction of reality, wherein mere participation in humanity's elaborated schedules makes distance between avowed temporal judgments and an undercurrent of more objective time. For instance, what would happen if global culture lost track of the passage of the years due to the complexity of information elaborating its rote performance? I am thinking of this not so much from a narrative science fiction perspective as an anthropological dissonance between (world) culture and context.

'Ask Ursula le Guin a question'
***Guardian Online* books**

Vintage Fashion: A Fantasy Narrative

Since the Renaissance, old clothing has been used as costume, a means for acting out borrowed identities. Alice Cicolini will discuss the recent vogue for vintage fashion in this context, positioning old clothing as a tool for the exploration of individual selfhood and the construction of personal narratives.

V&A Spring Programme

Pseuds Corporate

'...a suite of targets across a basket of core activities'

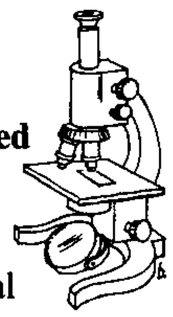
The Department of Culture, Media and Sport's definition of Public Library Standards, from Framework for the Future: Libraries, Learning and Information in the Next Decade

Like a river, in which the water is always there but is never the same, governance will always be there but will change, re-invent and evolve. Unlike many rivers which slow to a trickle, and then become shallow, muddy and dry up, the governance agenda continues to gain in depth, breadth and clarity. The need for disciplined, thoughtful and patient-centred approaches to care ratchets up every year.

From the South Tees clinical governance resource pack

CONTRIBUTORS: Michael Spindler, Kevin Kerrigan, Hilary Wade, Christine Winfield, Alan Stevens, Danny Langley.

UNDER THE MICROSCOPE



SHOULD taxpayers' money be used to subsidise snack food firms in their search for a more profitable crisp?

No less than £174,508 has been granted by the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council to allow chemists at Birmingham and Nottingham universities to research "how to improve adhesion" and "develop an understanding of the physics of the process".

As the "details of award" blurb says: "Characterisation of the range of snack food bases and flavour carriers will be made to establish parameters such as surface energy and surface permeability and hence important characteristics like wettability and the dynamics of spreading and absorption." Project partner is United Biscuits.

In other words, the government is handing over a sum that could keep a brace of medical researchers going for a couple of years to find out better ways of making hedgehog-flavoured crisps. It can be argued that such research has implications outside the fast-food industry – for instance in medicines – and it *does* have a generic purpose in reducing waste in food production generally. But it is harder to justify public money going to a project that could easily be funded by the firms most likely to profit directly – the junk food makers themselves. It is even harder to understand why any money should be directed at fast food at all when the government keeps telling us we are in the grip of an obesity epidemic, fuelled in part by dietary rubbish such as crisps and the like.

We are also constantly reminded that the begging bowl for British science is empty, our universities are strapped for cash and the brain drain is continuing. The exception, it seems, is the funding of "industrially relevant" research, as opposed to the sort of pure science that is less popular with politicians.

SCIENCE in general seems pretty unpopular with this government judging by the uncertainty now facing the learned societies representing chemistry, botany, geology, archaeology and astronomy, currently located in Burlington House, Picadilly.

Mr Justice Peter Smith will shortly rule on a complex legal dispute between the societies and the government, in the shape of John Prescott. He wants to start charging them market rent. There is no money for this, of course; so if the societies lose, expect them to decamp en-masse to a trading estate near Slough or somewhere even more remote.

It may not come to that; but the fact the government is even considering it (the site would fetch a lot as a commercial development), shows how low the status of science – and old-fashioned academia – have fallen.

'Boffin'

Suicide Watch

Letters

Crash course

Thanks to all those who responded to the letters in the last *Eye* that took issue with the connection we had made between inappropriate speed and road accidents (Crash Course, In the Back, Eye 1098). In citing the Transport Research Laboratory's report 323, it seems many readers have got hold of the wrong end of the stick.

This is an extract of an article published in *Transport Retort* by Marie Taylor, who leads the Transport Research Laboratory's research on speed and accidents...

Speed 'is a key factor in crashes'

THERE is a vast amount of evidence demonstrating the strong link between vehicle speed and road accidents. So why does material keep appearing in the media suggesting the effect is small?

In the 1990s a number of police forces conducted a limited trial of an experimental accident reporting system. The results were reported clearly in TRL report 323 but they have frequently been misquoted.

Speed increases the impact of many of the factors which contribute to accidents. For example, "aggressive driving" or "driving too closely" are both much worse at speed. Such factors were recorded in the system separately from speed but speed plays a big part in their effect on accidents. The system also allowed speed to be recorded in its own right.

The total effect of speed on accidents is obviously the sum of both types of factor.

Misunderstandings in the press appear to have resulted in two ways. First, speed identified as a separate factor in its own right was present in 15 percent of accidents, not the 7.3 percent, or lower figures, that are often wrongly quoted. Secondly, the 15 percent is only one part of the total effect of speed on accidents. When allowance is made for all of the other speed-dependent factors, the contribution is, we believe, much greater.

This means that speed is far more important in causing accidents and increasing their severity than the misquoted figures suggest. Importantly, other TRL studies have directly examined the relationship between speed and accidents.

- Studies of individual drivers have examined how drivers' speed choice affects their likelihood of accident involvement (TRL 421). Accident records of more than 10,000 drivers were related statistically to their observed speeding behaviour. These showed clearly that accident risk rises the faster a driver travels: at 25 percent above the average speed, a driver is about six times as likely to have an accident as a driver travelling at the average speed.
- Road-based studies looked at how speeds on a given road affect accidents occurring there (TRL 421 and 511). Several hundred thousand observations of vehicle speed on almost 300 roads of different types were related statistically to the numbers of accidents on those roads. These showed clearly that the faster the average speed of traffic on a given type of road, the more accidents there are...

Many "before and after" studies of measures that slow traffic and result in substantially fewer accidents have also been reported. All these studies together provide extremely robust evidence of how speed affects accidents. They are large-scale studies, of real traffic on real roads, involving rigorous statistical analyses. The conclusions are unambiguous. Ten people die and 100 are seriously injured on our roads per day. Improvements in driver behaviour have the potential to cut these statistics dramatically. Reducing drivers' speeds will play a vital part in this...

Cover blown

Sir,

Your "Shipman" cover (1099) was shamefully insensitive and cruel. Think about the families, not about how smart-arsed you can be.

I've got news for you – much more of this and my subs and your mag will die, doctor or not.

PAUL WILTSHIRE,

Great Missenden.

Spring into action

Sir,

SET UP FOR LIFE is the campaign for Gary Mills and Tony Poole who you have been reporting on over the past eight years I am told (many thanks). However, it has been brought to my attention that you have been referring to Mr Wiltshire as "David". That is incorrect. Mr Wiltshire's full name is Hensley Hendrix Wiltshire. I would have informed you of this earlier but I'm not a regular reader of Private Eye. The article that I saw some time ago I don't think carried the mistake.

If I can be of any further assistance then don't hesitate to contact me.

Yours,
RUSS SPRING,

Campaign Manager, Set Up For Life.

Lookalike

Postman Pat

Byford

Sir,

Have your readers noticed the remarkable similarity between Mark Byford, Acting Director General of the BBC, and Postman Pat?

Yours faithfully,
ROGER PROTZ,

St Albans.

Abbas abuse

Sir,

We have just returned from holiday to discover an item in the Rotten Boroughs section referring to our own borough of Tower Hamlets and felt so aggrieved by Cllr Abbas' remarks that I was compelled to write to him personally. (See below).

I do hope that many more will do the same. I have sent his comments round to all those on the Jesus Green Residents email list.

Carry on the good work.

Kind regards,
WANDA BRIGGS,

Via email.

Dear Cllr Abbas,

I should like to inform you that my husband and I have just read your inappropriate remarks about the sanity of people in this borough in our latest issue of Private Eye. As subscribers of long-standing to the magazine, we take exception to the suggestion that we might be insane. And that we need to "get a life".

You can guarantee that we now will not be voting for you or "new" Labour in the forthcoming elections. We will also be informing our like-minded friends and neighbours of your remarks.

And since we are subscribers to Private Eye, it's really not surprising that you seem to continue to hold the people of this borough in such contempt.

Letter from BBC News about checking stories for accuracy before printing them

Sir,

Your titbit about Fergal Keane's report for the Ten O'Clock News from the US wasn't quite right. We did send Fergal to do a report from Alabama. One copy of the tape was indeed erased. We do however – as usual – have a back-up copy of his report and we will be running the story shortly.

If you have any future stories about the Ten O'Clock News, you can always check them with me first before publishing them to make sure they're accurate.

PS: I think you should ask for your tenner back.

KEVIN BAKHURST,
Acting Editor, Ten O'Clock News.

A major correction

Sir,

Re: "a" Dvorak cello concerto. Dvorak wrote two cello concertos; one in B minor which is the famous one and no doubt the one your correspondent thinks is the only one. Dvorak wrote another cello concerto in A major which is not so widely known but was, in fact, the concerto Steven Isserlis performed before the now infamous flower-tossing occasion.

Therefore O'Boulez was absolutely right to refer to it as "a" Dvorak cello concerto. Take my word for it; I'm the librarian of the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra who had the pleasure of accompanying Isserlis on this auspicious concert at the Rudolphinum Hall in Prague.

PS: Let's not get into the semantics of how Dvorak died leaving only a cello and piano version and it was arranged and orchestrated by someone else. This correspondence risks becoming like the Dvorak symphony that finished long before the end.

DR TOMMY FOWLER,
Orchestral Librarian, BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra.

A Sea Lord writes...

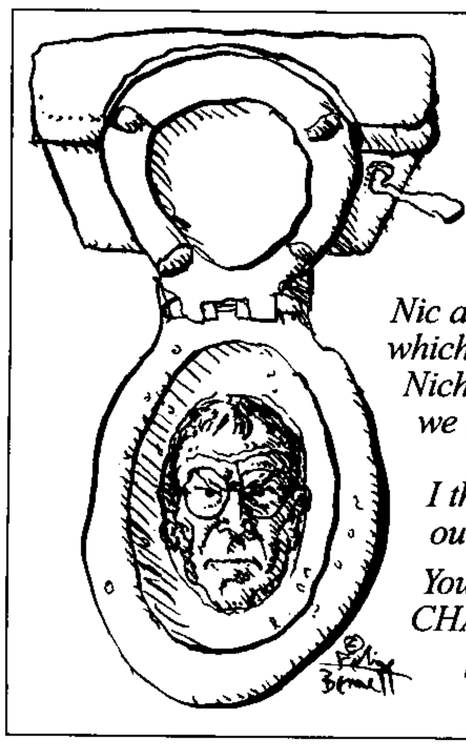
Sir,

I was interested to read (Eye 1098) that the Royal Air Force (RAF) appear to have taken delivery of a ship called Largs Bay that is, apparently, a "troup carrier" (sic). Could this be because they require a big vessel to transport the entertainers needed to keep the boys happy whilst deployed in foreign parts?

Or could it be the same RFA LARGS BAY, an amphibious assault ship, being built for the Royal Navy to be operated by the Royal Fleet Auxiliary (RFA)?

I think we should be told.

Yours pedantically,
SIR NIGEL ESSENHIGH
(former First Sea Lord),
Via email.



Anagram

Sir,

I notice that an anagram of "Sir Nicholas Serota" reads "Is Nic art or asshole"? In which category does Sir Nicholas fall? I think we deserve to be told.

Hold on a minute: I think I've worked it out.

Yours,
CHARLES THOMSON,
Stuckists art group.

A quiet success

Sir,

Having just watched Iain Duncan Smith this passing Saturday (7 Feb) at the Philharmonic Hall, Liverpool, I couldn't help but notice that he was an excellent speech giver; witty and intelligent. Having been under the impression that he was a "quiet man" who lacked personality and charisma, I was pleasantly pleased to discover that he contained both with abundance. I am in no way a Tory supporter but I did begin to wonder if Smith had been given an undue amount of abuse from certain corners of the media.

Perhaps in future leaders will be given more time to establish themselves before they are written off. As Smith has displayed, you can not always trust the media's interpretations.

Yours hopefully,
STEPHEN LUDLOW
(Politics and Philosophy student at Liverpool University),
Via email.

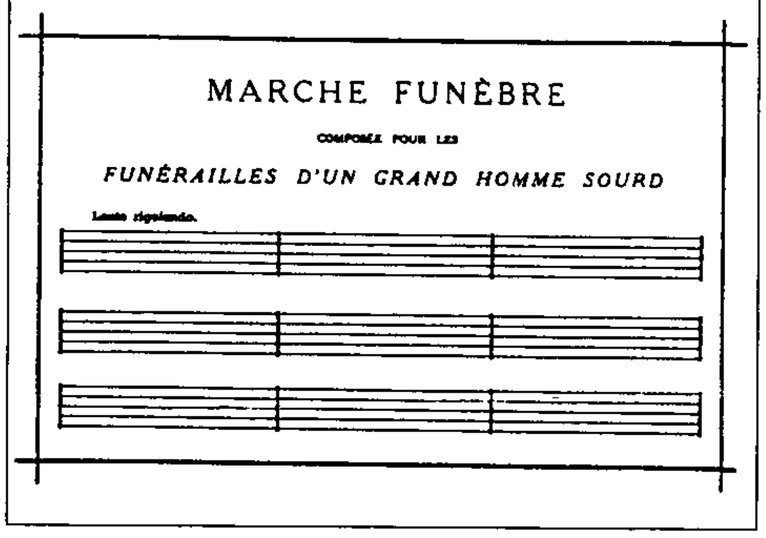
Silent witness

Sir,

Private Eye 1099 contained two references (pp. 13 and 17) to John Cage's "silent music" piece, 4 mins 33 secs.

Cage was not the first person to write "silent music". I enclose the score of Alphonse Allais' 1897 "Funeral March for the burial of a Great Deaf Man".

Yours sincerely,
MICHAEL G. FERGUSON,
Glasgow.


MARCHE FUNÈBRE

COMPOSÉE POUR LES

FUNÉRAILLES D'UN GRAND HOMME SOURD

Lento rigolando.

Charitable donation

Sir,

Re: Lunchtime O'Boulez 1099. I hope in your next column you won't let Making Music CEO Robin Osterley get away with his naïve and self-serving response to your justifiable criticism in Eye 1098.

You should make it clear that it is irrelevant whether, he as CEO, or President Maxwell-Davies instigated the scheme to benefit the latter at the charity's expense. The issue is that without specific prior authorisation by Governing Instrument or by the Charity Commission, the resources of a charity should not be applied to promote the enrichment of its president, however deserving or impoverished.

NAME & ADDRESS
WITHHELD.

Does it matter?

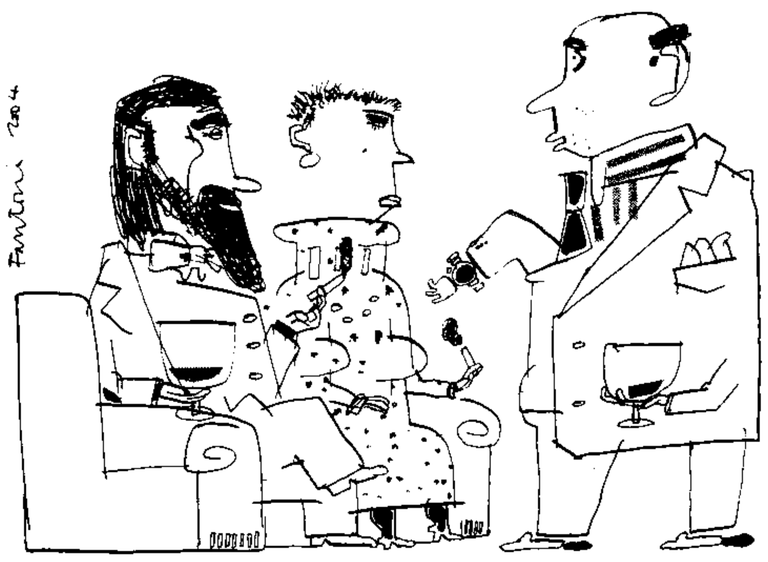
Sir,

Re: Dumb Britain 1099. There are, of course, not three but six states of matter (at current count). 1. Solid, 2. Liquid, 3. Gas, 4. Plasma, 5. Bose-Einstein condensate and 6. The newly-discovered fermionic condensate.

I'll just get my anorak!

Yours sincerely,
DAVE PROBERT,
Bristol.

Scenes You Seldom See



*"You're right, it **is** late. Why don't you go home?"*

Soft soaping

Sir,

Regarding Procter & Gamble's "Ariel, Stains & Science" (Ad Nauseum, 1099).

As a school science technician I have to say that I think it is a fantastic idea.

Thanks to P&G's generosity I've not had to buy any washing powder for the past twelve months.

Live long and prosper,
JONATHAN PARTINGTON,
Via email.

Just hot air

Sir,

You do take an unusual view of the electricity industry. Any London consumer has about as much chance of getting "green" electricity from a wind farm as he has of buying his supermarket litre of milk from a particular breed of Highland cattle in Ayrshire. The only alternative is to own the herd – i.e. make a direct connection to the wind farm, with the prospect of using candles during periods of calm weather. Otherwise he has to rely on a mixture of coal and gas generating stations (that produce millions of tons of greenhouse gas) and British/French nuclear generators and hydro-electric plants plus a small number wind farms (that don't).

CHARLES HUGHES,
Via email.

Sensible views

Sir,

For the last two consecutive editions, and potentially more, Eye has carried pictures of semi-naked women to satirise The Sun. How very ironic, well done.

SARAH ARNOTT,
Via email.

"But I know cannabis is safe, Mum... the voices in my head told me so"

Flu what a scorcher

Sir,

In view of the danger posed by the Asian Bird Flu, it would be a service to your readers if you could publish an educational photograph showing how a special protective vest should be worn when standing close to an Asian bird.

I have the honour to be, sir,

Your obedient subscriber,
CHARLES BARTON,

London SW8.

What a truck up

Sir,

Hedgehog says that after campaigning for the new M6 Toll road for 20 years the Freight Transport Association is "embarrassed" that trucks are not using the road (Eye 1099).

More like depressed than embarrassed. At the present toll of £20 for a round trip, later to rise to £22, the road operators Midlands Expressway Ltd have priced trucks out of the market, which is a great shame. But a round trip on the new road, costing £100 for a five day week, works out at £5,000 per year — per vehicle! It's too much for an industry working on very low margins.

However, Hedgehog's complaint that "taxpayers foot the bill" for trucks to continue using the M6 itself is wrong. The fact is that trucks already pay an enormous amount in tax for using a failing roads network. In 2004 a 44-tonne six-axle lorry doing 70,000 miles per year, operating very efficiently and fully laden for around 85 percent of the time, will pay £1,200 in vehicle excise duty plus £27,221 in fuel duty. That's almost £28,500 worth of tax for a single vehicle.

Not surprising, therefore, that operators are presently disinclined to pay a further £5,000 to use the new road until so doing presents a worthwhile saving in time and costs, which it fails to do at present.

And, by the way, if you've got it then it came on a lorry. Even Private Eye.

GEOFF DOSSETTER,

External Affairs Director, Freight Transport Association.

Straight talking

Sir,

Re: Absent fathers cartoon (1099). Why did you make all the lesbians hatchet-faced and unattractive? Hasn't your illustrator met any? Or did you want to reassure straight women that you weren't blaming them for test-tube baby boom, you only meant awful women with no hair. Could have been a funny topic for a cartoon if you hadn't resorted to such a tired cliché.

Everything else marvellous and hilarious, keep up the good work.

HELEN HITCHENS,

Via email.

Pseuds unlimited

Sir,

I don't see what you find so pseudy about the comments of the Head of Birmingham Library Service (Pseuds Corner, 1098). He makes a reasonable point, and makes it elegantly. I'm surprised this is the best (ie worst) you can come up with. Given the colossal deluge of this kind of twaddle indulged in by corporate types these days I might suggest you expand Pseuds Corporate. On the other hand, since this stuff tends to be stultifyingly, mind-numbingly dull, perhaps I won't.

Cheers,
FRANCIS ELERS,

Via email.

Out of Controller?

Sir,

I have just been handed Eye 26/12, page 8, in which Remote Controller alleges we all used to see Premiership soccer free.

*When Sky beat ITV in the first open tender there was **no Premiership**. "Match of the Day" comprised highlights of a single match (often from Division 3) and **no** Div 1, 2 or 3 games were shown "live" **at all**.*

The recent second bidding for the Premiership was also transparent and all other journals feel that, as Sky has to share only eight games a year with terrestrial stations, they came out of it pretty well.

*Controller also laments the sidelining of the annual Vienna concert to BBC4. BBC2 carried this "live" from 11.15 to 12.40 and the BBC4 items was a **repeat** from 19.00 which, for only the second time, shared ORF/ZDF's coverage of the, previously not shown, **first** half.*

HENRY RUSSELL,

Hampton, Middlesex.

Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

"He [Jimmy White] has popped out to the toilet to compose himself before the final push."
STEVE DAVIS, BBC2
(Laim McCormick)

"He's not the sharpest sandwich in the picnic."
TONY CASCARINO, Talksport Radio
(Jonathan Williamson)

"Had we not got that second goal the score might well have been different."
DAVID PLEAT, LBC
(C. Davey)

"It is hard to imagine Crouch scoring his second had he not scored his first."
HYDER JAWAD, Birmingham Post
(John Severs)

"It's the longest frame of the match and it's only the first frame..."
WILLIE THORNE, BBC2
(Dave Ainsworth)

Casson medal

Sir,

Re Securewest International. I must leap to the defence of John Casson and Securewest re their employing Nepalese nationals. Having worked with Securewest (now Casson Management Services, by the by: I sometimes fix computers for them) for many years; I can assure you that said Nepalese nationals are very grateful for such few opportunities as are open to them in the outside world. I've talked to several of them over the years.

Mr Casson is an ex-cop (with a very good record); who set up a security and guarding firm, and did very well. His hiring policy (of using ex-service personnel with exemplary records) seemed to be quite popular with customers more used to hiring old criminals as "security". Amongst these were customers in health and security and other governmental posts. He sold up; retained a core of staff; and went into doing the same thing on an international basis. Ships in ports need guards. I would argue that having a British military background might be an asset at the gangplank to an American warship; given that the alternative would probably be a grunt with an M-16.

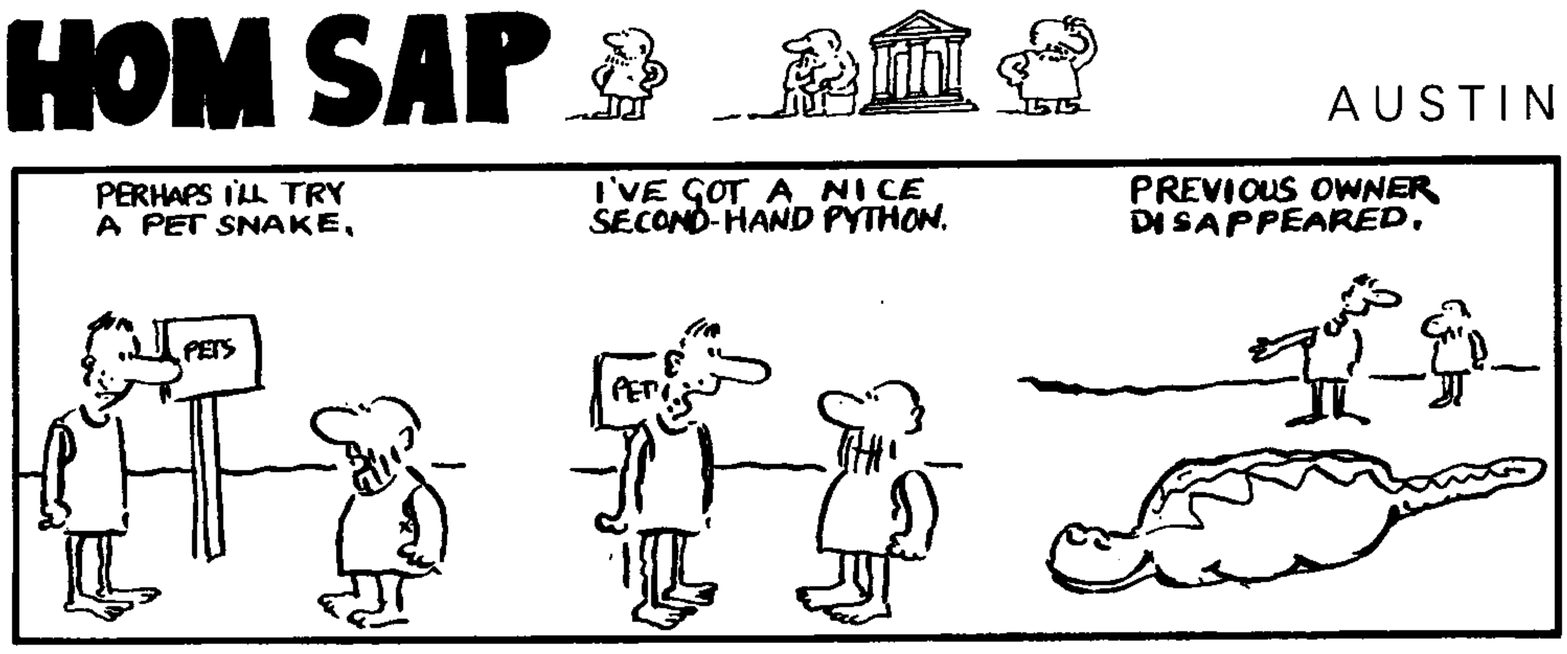
In Mr Casson and the Nepalese case, in my limited experience with him on this matter, I can assure you that his interests in that beleaguered nation have always been of the most benign kind.

Check out the Nepalese average annual wage; and then ask yourself who else is hiring and helping such people directly – especially one's with such useful skills and experiences. We should be ashamed of him for this? I can't see it.

More power to the organ.

Regards,
YABBLE,

Via email.



Letter from **Addis Ababa**

from Our Own Correspondent

WELCOME to the cradle of humanity. In Ethiopia we have the remains of "Lucy", 3.4m years old, and the oldest homo sapiens skull, "Idultu", 160,000 years old. We can even show you the Tomb of Adam. But if we're the oldest, we're also the poorest.

According to the UN, 69 million of us survive (or not) on less than $100 a year each. We've just had a good harvest, so only one in ten of us will need food aid. Last year it was more than 14 million.

Such poverty is not always visible to distinguished visitors staying at Africa's best hotel: the five-star Addis Ababa Sheraton which dwarfs the presidential palace next door, Emperor Haile Selassie's old pad. We've a lot of other attractions too; but with an HIV/AIDS pandemic and more than three million carriers, some have lost their gloss.

Still, we have had a lot of visitors recently, all urging us to give back the dusty town on the border with Eritrea over which we have fought a bitter, costly and pointless war. We won't. Eritrea invaded in 1998 and seized Badme. We took it back. The boundary commission set up by a peace agreement in 2000 to provide a "final and binding" border then made a real mess of things, giving us Eritrean villages we don't want and Eritrea a lot of Ethiopian villages it doesn't want. But it does want Badme and so do we. It's a matter of pride: Eritrea lost 40,000 men and the war; we lost 60,000 and won.

Britain says we should abide by a ruling our Prime Minister Meles Zenawi (who never seemed keen on the war) has called "illegal, unjust and irresponsible". At the same time Britain is giving us £90m in budget relief to spend any way we like! For the moment, 4,200 UN peacekeepers keep us and Eritrea apart at an annual cost to the international community of $180m. If the troops go, there will be another war. Neither country can afford one (we couldn't the last time either) but we each continue to arm the other's dissidents.

British sympathy for our cause seems linked to Meles's trip to the UK last year, where he so impressed your Mr Blair that he was invited back for the "progressive leaders'" summit. The "progressive" tag was a surprise. The government here has pushed through a new press law described as a "severe and unnecessary restriction" on journalists.

Perhaps such moves will help stifle the likes of Professor Mesfin Woldemariam, president of our Human Rights Council. He blames the many bloody clashes and conflicts in our country on our federal system of government, which gives power to nine ethnically-based states. That's fine for the main groups, but less so for dozens of minorities who are more marginalized than ever. We've tried to create "special zones" to satisfy special interests but it doesn't always work. Two years ago hundreds died in inter-ethnic fighting in Tepi, and more than 40 unarmed demonstrators were shot by police in Awassa. Last year it was Anuak and Nuer in Gambella State. Hundreds have died and army intervention only seems to have led to more deaths as trouble brews elsewhere.

Some people though are doing all right. Like the mayor of Addis Ababa, Ato Arkebe, who earns $500 a month — although no one tells us what the PM gets. We have an active ethics and anti-corruption commission, although it is struggling to get our leaders to register all their properties. It all takes a long time and seems remote from the business of ending war and hunger. It took three years for parliament to agree to set up an ombudsman's office. That was in 2001. Committees are still checking out aspiring candidates to head it. Decisions are expected "very soon". We aren't holding our breath.

FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY **VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH**

● "I was adding a fresh batch of magazines to my stack when the pile became unstable," Patrick Moore told reporters from his hospital bed in New York's St. Barnabas Hospital. "And before I knew it, I'd triggered an avalanche of books and magazines that buried me naked right up my neck, until I couldn't move. I kept hollering 'Let me out! Let me out!' but nobody came to help, and it was two days before an ambulance crew finally turned up to rescue me."

Later, a spokesman from St Barnabas gave further details of what had happened to Moore, 42, who was recovering in hospital from multiple contusions, mild concussion, damaged eardrums, skin burns, and dehydration. "He is an obsessive collector of magazines, mostly pornography and science fiction, and his entire apartment is stacked from floor to ceiling with tens of thousands of publications, with barely any room to move. He'd made a corridor through the books so he could

get in and out, but on this occasion he finally unbalanced the stacks, and they fell on top of him. His landlord, Bennie Jones, told us that he'd heard Moore shouting on the Sunday, but took no notice, because he's always shouting obscenities to himself anyway. When our ambulance crew were finally called on the Tuesday, they were unable to open the apartment door, because of the weight of magazines behind it, so they removed the door from its hinges, then clambered over the mountain of paper to get to him. The man urgently needs shelving."

The spokesman then recalled "a similar case from 1947, when Harlem brothers Homer and Langley Collier were crushed to death in their own house by their own collection of encyclopaedias and clutter. On that occasion, it took eighteen days to find the bodies under the debris, which included not just paper, but also a Model T Ford, an antique motorcycle, a collection of stuffed rats, and ten pianos." *(New York Daily News, 30/12/03. Spotter: Tim Richardson)*

– ● –

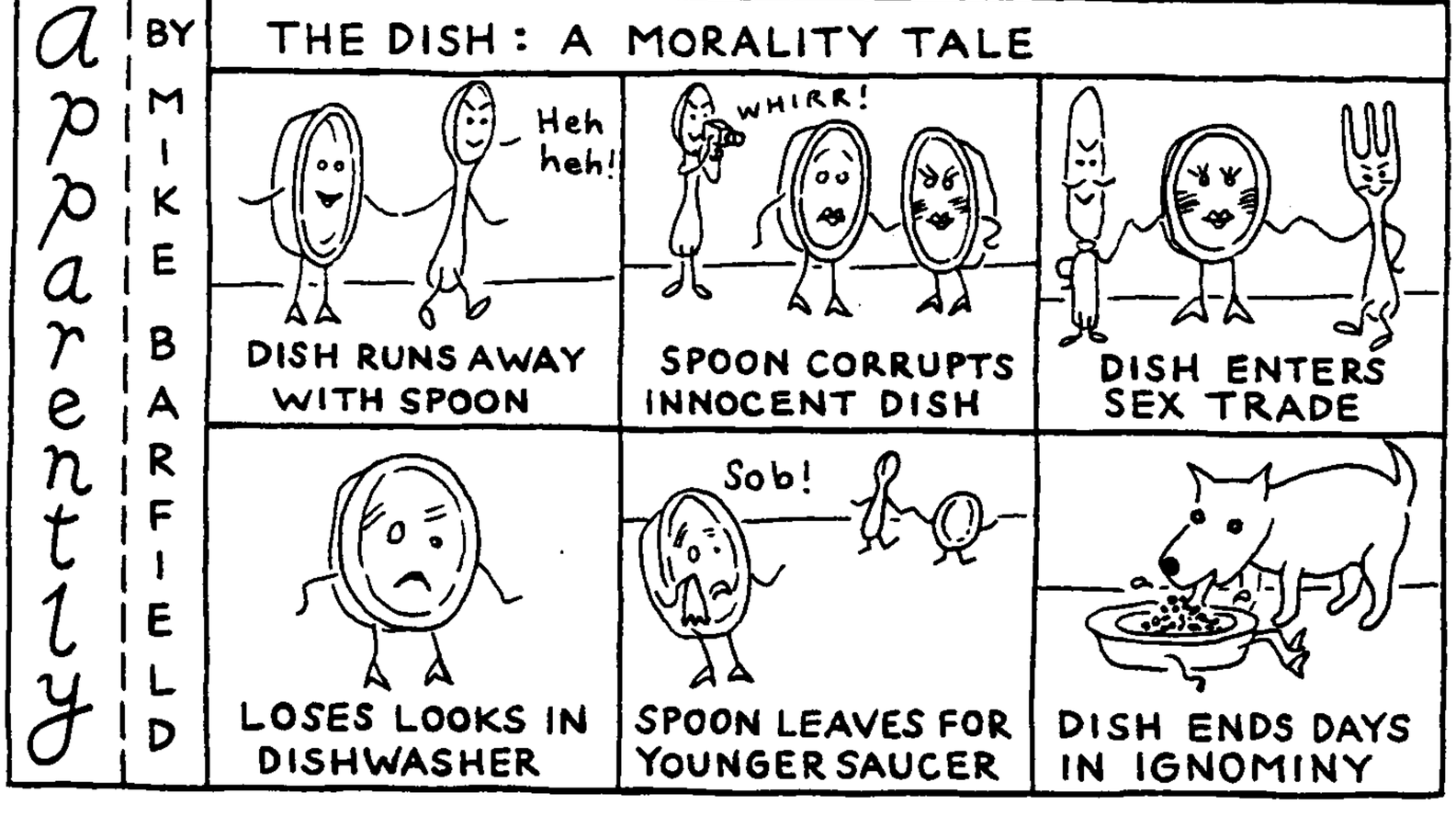
● *"Sir, On 7th December, I took part in the Singapore Marathon. Before the event, I went to a temporary toilet outside the National Stadium, and unfortunately overbalanced as I sat over the trench. After a struggle, I managed to save myself from falling in, but sadly my wallet tumbled down and fell into the latrine. I tried to retrieve it, but it was far out of reach, and submerged in a pit of filth, so with a heavy heart I left it there and set off for the race.*

"After the marathon was over, at about noon, I contacted the event organisers, and told them of my mishap. That very evening, a man called Mai Ng turned up at my door and presented me with my wallet, which was soiled beyond all imagination. Even now, it stinks so badly that it makes me vomit and I cannot keep it in the house. I can only imagine the terrible stench that must have greeted Mai Ng when he was ordered to find it. I am deeply touched by the effort put in by all those who retrieved and returned my wallet and I hope that Mai Ng recovers from his illness very soon. Yours sincerely, Tan Ai Lee." (The Straits Times, 3/1/04. Spotter: Matthew Taylor)

– ● –

● "Why does everybody think this is funny?" Emanuel Fleming asked reporters as he spoke to them from his home in Cahokia, near St. Louis, Illinois. "My whole hand went numb, the bone in my finger felt like it was going to break, and it was probably the most painful event of my life. Yet nobody thinks I deserve any sympathy, just because I was determined to get my 50 cents back from the coin return slot."

Earlier, Herb Simmons of the Simmons Ambulance Co. had given his account of what had occurred. "I've been in this business more than thirty years, and I've seen a lot of weird things, but I've never seen anyone trapped in a telephone before. Mr Fleming was trying to retrieve his coin from a pay phone, and he somehow tried so hard that he got his finger trapped in the coin return slot. At first he'd struggled, but that just made his finger swell up. Then he'd asked passers-by to help, but they couldn't release him, so eventually he used his other hand to dial 911 and called us. But we couldn't free him either, and neither could the phone company, so in the end we had to cut the entire telephone out of the ground, and take Mr Fleming to St Mary's Hospital with the pay phone still attached. Then the doctors and engineers worked together, and after three hours they eventually got him loose, using a lubricant, a wooden spatula, and some oxyacetylene equipment." *(Northwest Indiana Times, 19/11/03. Spotter: Wallace Brown)*



THE DAILY BUSH TELEGRAPH

Why Bush Is The Real War Hero

Mark Steyn

OK, so Senator John Kerry fought in Vietnam and won a few medals. What is so heroic about that? Let's not forget that George Bush showed enormous courage by going to the dentist whilst he was in the Texas Home Guard. In my book, that shows Bush is the real war hero. And what was Kerry up to while Bush was risking his life for his country in the dentist's chair?

I'll tell you – this so-called Vietnam veteran was cosying up to peacenick traitor Jane Fonda in the hope of bringing down the American Government.

And now we find out that Kerry had an affair with an intern according to the highly authoritative website *republicansmear.neo.con*. That doesn't surprise those of us who see Kerry for what he is – a yellow-bellied dope-smoking hippy! How long until we find out that he shot Kennedy when he was supposed to be killing Vietcong?

Not for cowardy Kerry the dangers of the Texan dentist's drill nor the hell of the peppermint-flavoured mouth-wash but *(You're fired. Brillo)*

SHOCK NEW TESTS FOR 18-YEAR-OLDS

by Our Education Staff **Linda Chalk**

IN THE biggest shake up of secondary education since the last shake-up, the government has announced plans to scrap GCSEs, AS Levels and A Levels and to replace them with an all-purpose Educational Diploma.

Students at 18 will be confronted with a single exam paper which tests numeracy and literacy by asking the following two questions:

1. What is your name?

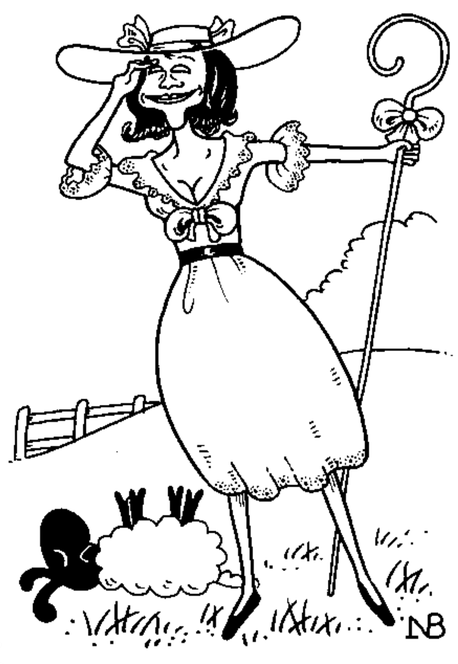
2. How old are you?

(Time allowed: 2 hours)

Nursery Rhymes Revisited

No. 94

Ba-ba-Barbara Black
Have you any money?
No sir, no sir,
The Hollinger shareholders
have taken it all away.
(Anon)



BISHOP ATTACKS BLAIR

GLENDA SLAGG

FLEET STREET'S QUEEN OF THE JUNGLE

■ HATS, trousers and everything else off to the Tory sexpot John Redwood!?!? He's the man they called The Vulcan 'cos he looked cold and frigid – like Mr Spock on a bad day!?!? Well, now he's proved that Johnny Redwood has got pumping Red Blood through his Tory veins!?! Geddit!?!! No wonder luscious right-wing blonde bombshell Nikki Page has got a smile a mile wide on her cute lil' face!?!?! Who wouldn't be if they were a-kissin' and a-cuddlin' with the Backbench Romeo!?!?

■ JOHN REDWOOD – what a rat!?!? Just when we thought we'd heard the last of Tory sleaze, the loony Vulcan Redwood proves he's from another planet!?!? His cold-blooded ditching of his lovely, faithful and poorly Missus is enough to make your flesh crawl!?!? There's only one thing to do with Redwoods when they are rotten?!? Get out your chopper (and I don't mean *you*, John!) and cut it down!?!? All together now – Tim-ber!?!?

■ *EMMA THOMPSON – what a disgrace!?!? Who does she think she is, flaunting herself at the Baftas in a glamorous frock?!? Face the truth, sweetheart – you're no Scarlett Johansson!?!? She's the sexy star of Hollywood's* Lost In Translation *but there's no need to translate my message to Emma!?!? For years I've been telling her to smarten up and wear a proper dress to the Baftas instead of looking like a frumpy old school marm on a walking tour of the Yorkshire Dales!?!? And what happens?!?!? She does what I told her and turns up in a drop-dead-gorgeous gown that had the geezers a-dribblin' and a-droolin' down their bowties!?!?! Three cheers for Sex Queen Emma, who's finally given us all a glimpse of her to-die-for curves!?!?!!*

■ HERE THEY ARE – Glenda's Leap Year Lotharios!

● **Oliver Letwin** – He wants to lower taxes! How about lowering your trousers, Big Boy! That would get *my* vote!?!?

● **Jose Antonio Reyes** – He scored two for the Arsenal?!?!? Make it a hat-trick with Aunty Glenda!?!? This way, Jose!?!?!

● **El Greco** – Crazy name, crazy guy!?!?!?

Byeeee!!!

newstatesman

Shock Nazi Orgy at New Statesman

by Freelance Writer **BARRY FANTASY**

I shall never forget the sight that met my eyes when I entered the Victoria Street offices of the supposedly respectable magazine the New Statesman.

Gangs of young journalists, many of them Welsh, joined in a chorus of the Horst Wessel song as they saluted their Führer Peter Wilby (real name Peter Wildeschwein). At his side his beautiful deputy, the Italian-born Christina O'Mussolini, stroked his black leather *(cont. p. 94)*

THE EDITOR: The above article may not be true, but it was accepted in good faith because there wasn't anything else very interesting to put in. *P. Wilby*

ST ALBION PARISH NEWS

Incumbent: Rev A.R.P. Blair MA (Oxon)

A WARNING TO ALL PARISHIONERS FROM THE FORMER CHURCHWARDEN MR MANDELSON

I have asked to be allowed a little space in this week's newsletter to spell out a few home truths to all those members of our congregation who may be on the verge of doing something very silly.

These people are still going on about Mr Hutton as if there were still any questions to be answered.

Let's get it clear in our heads, shall we? Mr Hutton explained in a way that anyone should have been able to understand, that the Vicar, Mr Campbell and Mr Hoon were absolutely and entirely free of any blame for what happened to Dr Mitty, or indeed anything else.

And if you don't believe Mr Hutton, then just you wait until Mr Butler's report comes out!

But I'm getting ahead of myself. What is important now is to remember what could only too easily happen to the parish, if the trouble-makers and peddlers of tittle-tattle carry on undermining the best vicar that this parish has ever had!

Do *I* have to spell it out? OK, I will!

In less than 45 minutes we could see everything we have worked for over the last seven years left in ruins. All it would take is our vicar, my friend Tony, to wake up one morning and say, "Hey, I've had enough!".

I can almost hear him saying, "Peter, the sheer level of ingratitude shown by this parish has finally got to me. You're the only one who's ever shown me any loyalty! Peter, you are my rock! You're a fighter, not a quitter!"

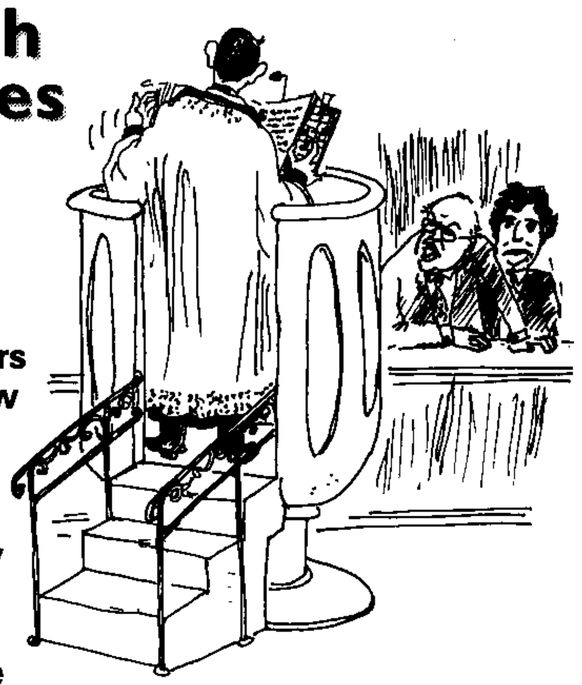
And who could blame the Vicar for having these thoughts?

How many times did I think about quitting, before deciding not to and being given the sack (twice!).

And have any of you thought what the alternative will be, if Tony decides to "take up his bed and walk"?

Some people seem to think it'll all be fine if Mr Brown, our treasurer, takes over the running of the parish during the inter regnum. Let me tell you, I've had quite a few dealings with our treasurer in recent years,

Parish Scenes



Some annoying parishioners never know when *not* to ask questions! As seen by local artist Mr de la Nougerede

and time and again I have had to warn the vicar that he is a Judas in our midst!

As for Mr Campbell, he used to go around telling people that I was too friendly with my friends the Hinduja brothers – Gotricha and Bakhanda – when I'd never met them (except once or twice), and, if you don't believe me, I suggest you dig out an old copy of Mr Hammond's wonderful report, which was every bit as conclusive as Mr Hutton's and indeed as Mr Butler's will be!

Where was I? Oh yes, Mr Campbell. Obviously, in the light of his very sad nervous breakdown, and his chronic depression at being unemployed, I have no wish to point out what a disastrous embarrassment he has been to Tony, and I am sure we all wish him the very best in his new career trying to be funny on the stage (apparently there are still quite a few tickets available!).

But this is missing the real point of why I have asked to be able to make this statement to you all!

The enemies of the parish are massing, both within and without!

All these dark forces need is for certain parishioners to turn on Tony in the way they have been doing – Mr Cook and Mrs Short will know very well whom I'm talking about – and all our achievements under Tony's inspired leadership will be blown away and forgotten. Even I myself could find myself out of work! (Not that that is why I am writing this warning to you all!) I am only thinking of Tony and of you! To try to stop you all making the most catastrophic error of your lives!

So that is why I am giving you all this last chance to come to your senses, and give Tony the support he deserves!

If you don't, you have only yourselves to blame if I have to take more drastic measures!

Remember, all your names and addresses are in my database!

Do I have to spell it out further?

Alright, I will. I know where you live!

Your,

PM, Former Churchwarden and now acting, unofficial consultant to the Vicar

VERY IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT

A lot of parishioners may have wondered what Mr Birt has been doing up there in the attic of the vicarage in the past few years. I can now reveal that he has not been just looking out of the window hoping to see some "blue sky", as some parishioners have suggested! No, John has been carrying out a "Total Audit", reviewing every single aspect of life in the parish, and he has now come up with a formula which will in future be applied to all policy decisions that we have to take!

As John himself puts it, "My Strategic Policy Equation is scientific, comprehensive and pro-active in equal measure. It provides an answer to all the known questions of the universe. It is the work of a genius, and will be known in future as 'Birt's Law'".

This is the formula. If 'D' is the desired objective, 'E' is the eventual outcome, 'S' is the steps necessary to get from 'D' to 'E', 'W' is the middle name of the US President, 'M' is Mr Mandelson, then W+M+D = O. (I think I've got this right!)

I will be posting more details on the vicarage website within a few days, including how this equation can be easily adapted to evaluate and resolve any problem, from the "restructuring of the flower rota" to "the re-engineering of biscuit provision at our post-service coffee sessions". T.B!

A Message from the Rev. Dubya, of the Church of the Latter-Day Morons

Brothers and sisters in Great Englandland, it grieves me most grieviously to tell you that your pastor and my former friend Tony Blair has betrayed me by telling me falsitudes and untruthisms.

According to your Reverend Blair, the evil one Sattan Hussein was armed with deadly weapons that could bring anihilationness and destructitude to the whole world.

I believed him but now I find that the Reverend's words were empty. He was a false prophet that led Brother Rumsfeld, Sister Neo-Condoleezza and even myself astray – yeah, into the wilderness of erroneousness and wrongfullness. Wherefore I say, woe unto ye, Pastor Blair, who brought the world to the eve of Armageddon. Ye have borne false witness and shall be cast out into utter darkness with your chippy wife Lady Cherylene! It was all your fault!

Thus saith Dubya, holder of the great Seal of the Lord.

(Do we still have to put this stuff in? P.M.)

Have A Great Tripoli!!!

Dear everyone

Cherie and I are having a short break with our new friend Col Gaddafi out here in Libya! As you all know, he is a penitent who has asked for forgiveness for all his former sins, and it has been a great honour for me to be the one chosen to hear his confession and grant him absolution. Mr Mandelson has every kindly volunteered to put together the newsletter while I am away. I have no idea what he will be putting in, but I am sure he will do a great job!

Best wishes, Tony

POLLY FILLER

I'm A Columnist – Get Me In There

THE triumph of Kerry McFadden has sent a message well beyond the outback of Australia. The world now knows that women are not just survivors but winners in the jungle of life!

Kerry is, of course, a classic working mother and, as such, was well equipped to cope with the minor trials and tribulations of a fortnight with a bunch of overgrown children – most of them men! After all, what is a bushtucker challenge compared to washing your useless partner's sweaty underpants after a game of six-a-side football? What's eating a witchety grub compared to forcing yourself to swallow your toddler's leftover Dinoburger smothered in peanut butter and custard?

And you don't know what boredom is until you've stood around in the playground listening to the non-working mums droning on about their dreary children and which schools they are trying to get into.

No, like Kerry (though a bit slimmer and prettier, not to mention brighter, so I am told!), yours truly could easily see off the Lord Brottens, Johnny Vegas and André Previns of this world!

That's why I'm willing to take part in the next 'I'm A Celebrity...' – to show the world that we girls can be wife, mother, icon, columnist and Queen of the Jungle.

In previous years, to be honest, I've been dismayed by the low calibre of the celebrities and the mean and unpleasant tone of the programme. But now that we have seen that famous, pleasant and good-natured women can win, I feel it's acceptable for someone like me to join in the fun without demeaning myself.

Not only could I beat the feeble men, but I would have no trouble taking on the dim slapper with the barrage-balloon breasts, the toffee-nosed old bag with no knickers, and the dull-as-ditchwater dolly-bird Kerry going on and on about her family and her career!

I think we all know who the public would take to their hearts!

SO, I'VE packed my bags and I'm ready to fly out to the jungle any time! And the good thing is that the useless Simon will get to see even more of me than normal, as he is permanently glued to the ITV 24/7 Celeb Plus Channel hosted by Lady Victoria Hervey and A.A. Gill.

But I've told the producers I'll only go on one condition – that I'm allowed to bring as my luxury Lin Po, my fantastic new au pair from Southern China, who will be more than happy to carry out all the beastly jobs around the camp, allowing me time to show the world how we women really can do it all!!!

© Polly Filler.

That New Atheist Assembly In Full

Head: Our Father who doesn't exist.

All: Amen.

Head: We will now have a moment of reflection where we ponder on the fact that there is no God.

(Silence)

(There will then follow a reading from the works of a well-known atheist. It may be P.B. Shelley or it may be Sir Jonathan Miller)

Head: And now the creed.

All: We believe that you shouldn't believe in anything. Except the fact that there is nothing to believe in. Amen.

(There then follows a popular song. It could be 'My Old Man's An Atheist' or similar)

(That's enough Assembly. Ed.)

'Wise Men' Were Probably Women Priests, Says C of E

by Our Religious Affairs Staff **Christina O'Booze**

IN THE biggest shake-up the Church of England has known since last week, the Synod has ruled that the so-called "Three Wise Men" were not "wise" or "men", and were probably "only two in number".

"The most sensible explanation of this ridiculous old story," says top theologian Dr Agatha Nostick, "is that the Magi (from the Persian 'Maggi', a great female leader) were in fact a same-sex couple of high-ranking Chaldean princesses who were hoping to find a baby which social workers would allow them to adopt."

● Another long-overdue reform, proposed by the Synod, is that Church services should no longer be held on Sundays, but should be held at more suitable times, eg weekday evenings when there is no football on television.

HUTTON: BBC Hits Back At Government

EXCLUSIVE TO ALL NEWSPAPERS

SMOKING REALLY IS BAD FOR YOU

More shock revelations on other pages.

Pope revealed to be a Catholic **9** Bears do defecate in woods **25**

'I HAVE A DREAM'

Michael Luther Howard Salutes Gay Marriages

by Our Political Staff **Peter O'Bore**

THE political world was rocked to its foundations yesterday when the spiritual leader of Britain's 65-strong Conservative sect outlined his vision for the kind of country in which he would like to live when he is older.

That Howard Dream In Full

"Brothers and sisters, I have a dream. A dream of a Great Britain in which people are nice to each other. Irrespective of their ethnic background, religious affiliation or gender orientation.

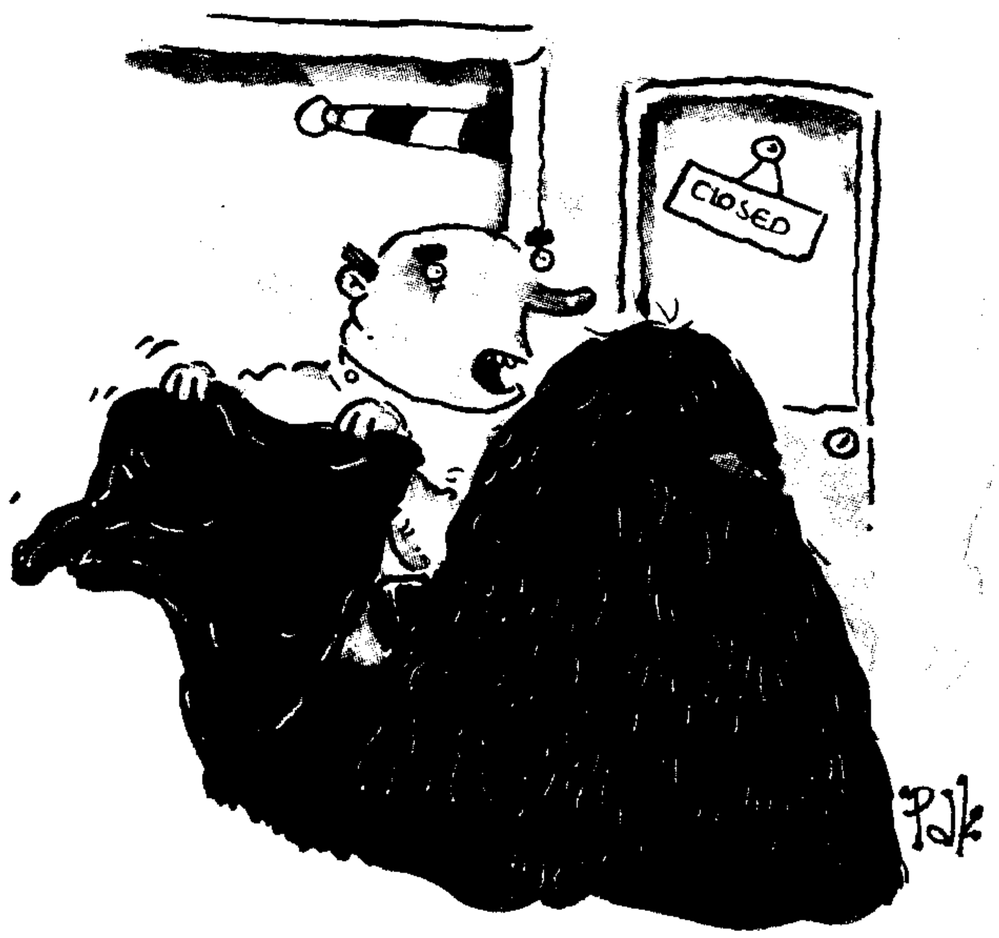
"Yes, I have a dream. Of a Britain where taxes are much lower than they have been under this Labour government. Not immediately, obviously. But in due course.

"I have a dream. Of a Britain where people can vote Conservative without feeling embarrassed. Not immediately obviously. But in due course.

"I have a dream. Of a Britain where a poor, hardworking immigrant from Transylvania can come over here in a boat and rise to become leader of a great political party, without anyone making anti-vampire remarks, which in my view are totally uncalled-for and not at all helpful in our task of building a new tolerant Britain, where gay people can get married and have children just like anyone else. And, of course, pay lower taxes.

"And did I mention that in the dream there's this bit about cutting the number of bureaucrats. Not immediately obviously. But in due course."

At this point the sun rose, and Mr Howard remembered an urgent meeting in the church crypt.



"Long time no see"

"He doesn't like being left on his own"

BRITISH 'FBI' LAUNCHED

by Our Crime Reporter **Elliot Mess**

THE HOME Office today confirmed the establishment of the SOCA (The Serious Organised Crime Agency), touted to be the British equivalent of the FBI, at a cost of some eighty million pounds to the taxpayer.

"The activities investigated by the agency were previously carried out by an organisation known as the police," said a Home Office Minister, "however we felt that "police" wasn't a sexy enough name to get us lots of coverage in the newspapers, hence the creation of SOCA.

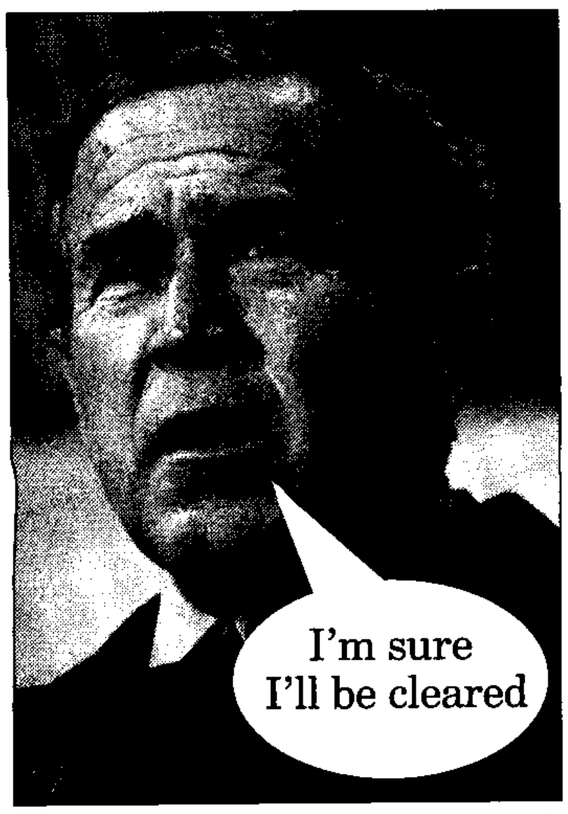
"We are confident that the Serious Organised Crime Agency will pay for itself as it generates unprecedented press coverage over the next twelve months, especially if it becomes the setting for a crime drama on ITV starring Robson Greene or Ken Stott."

That Terry Wogan Honorary Degree Citation In Full

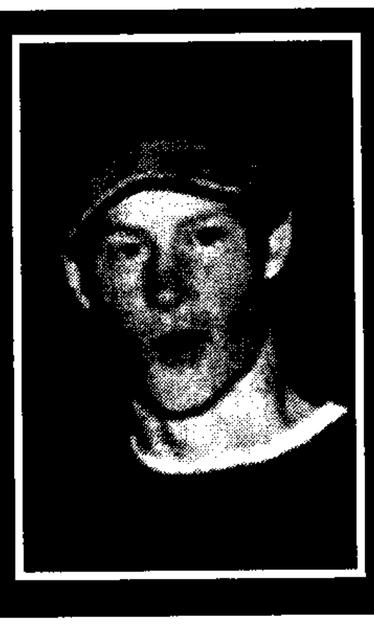
SALUTAMUS TERENTIUM WOGANENSIS POPULARITER APPELATUS "TEL" FAMOSISSIMUM PRESENTATOR HIBERNICUS MULTORUM PROGRAMMORUM IN RADIO TELEVISIONEQUE NOTABILE COMPETITIONE EUROVISIONE ANNUALE CANTORUM PISSPOORUM EX NORVEGICAE ESTONIAQUE MALTAQUE ET GRANDE BRITANNICAE (NULLUS POINTUS MMIII). PATRONUS ET DUX "TOGORUM", SOCIETAS BOROS SEXUAGENARIANES IN BBC RADIO DUO CUM STICKEROS VEHICULENSIS "EGO SUM TOGGUS" PROCLAMAVERUNT. THATCHUM SUPERBUM CORONATUM SUSPICIONE UNIVERSALE WIGGUM. SALUTAMUS TERENTIUM WIGANENSIS. *(NONNE ERRATUM EDITORUS?)*

© LIMERICK UNIVERSITY

INQUIRY INTO INTELLIGENCE LAUNCHED



19-YEAR-OLD BOY GOES OUT FOR EVENING



by Our Entire Staff

A 19-year-old boy went out last night. He is believed to have had a drink and talked to some girls. *Reuter.*

On Other Pages

■ Why Harry Should Join the Army at Once by Sir Max Hastings **8**

■ Good on Yer Harry! says TV's Lord Brocket **10**

■ Can Staying up Late Lead to Tiredness? asks Dr Thomas Utterfraud **12**

■ Anthony Howard at 70 *(Surely some mistake? Ed.)* **14**

EXCLUSIVE TO ALL PAPERS

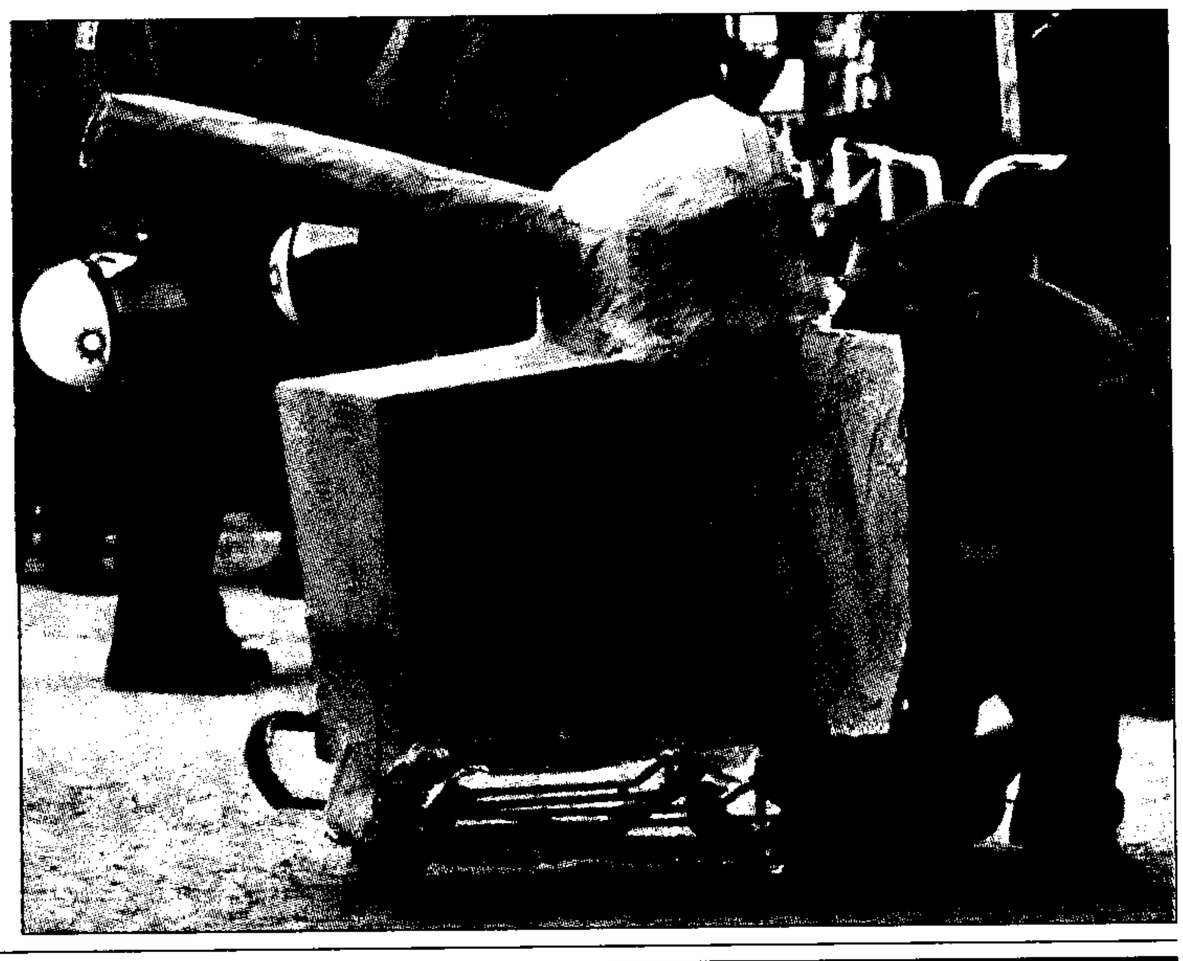
AN APOLOGY

WE MAY, in recent months, have given the mistaken impression through headlines such as "Smirking Asylum Seekers Bleeding Our Benefits System Dry" that asylum seekers were evil, smirking, individuals coming here to exploit our benefit system so as to live a life of astonishing luxury in Britain.

We now realise, in the light of the deaths of nineteen Chinese nationals cockle-picking off Morecambe Bay, that nothing could be further from the truth, and that asylum seekers are helpless, pathetic individuals exploited by evil gang-masters to live a life of horrific slavery here in Britain.

We apologise for any confusion caused, and any confusion in the future, when a group of Algerians are found huddled in the back of a lorry at Dover. We demand a stop to the flood of evil Smirking Asylum Seekers Bleeding Our... ***(cont. p. 94)***

DEFENCE BUDGET CUT AGAIN



A Doctor Writes

Obesity

AS a doctor I am often asked, "Would you like a fat cheque?"

The simple answer is, "Yes, of course."

What happens is that the doctor is rung up by a newspaper with a request to write a very big piece about the plague of obesity sweeping Britain or *Fattus Bastardus Normalis*, as it is medically known.

The doctor then attempts to resist the fat cheque, but is unable to restrain himself. Usually he takes it immediately and then goes off for a heavy lunch which may have the side effect of making him drowsy and lethargic.

The doctor then attempts to write the piece which often turns out to be very thin indeed.

If you are worried about obesity, you should see your editor at once.

© *All newspapers.*

Teacher of Design and Technology MPS

We are seeking to appoint from September 2004 an enthusiastic Design and Technology teacher. An interest in Art and Design would be useful.

Advertisement Suffolk CC

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Advertisement, Newcastle CC

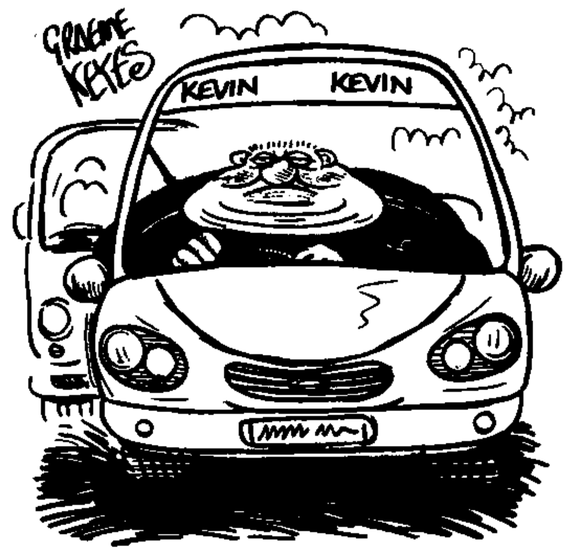
funeral services

Rapid Despatch

Urgently require

Owner Drivers

Reading Chronicle



ME AND MY SPOON

THIS WEEK

NO. 94 BARBARA AMIEL

You are said to have one of the largest collections of spoons in the world. Is it true?

Yes, I suppose I do have millions of spoons. Whole cupboards full of them.

Do you know how many you have?

I've no idea. I just keep on buying them. When you've got as many houses as we have, you've got to have rather more spoons than the ordinary person.

Are the spoons you buy very expensive?

Well, yes, I suppose they are. But we do entertain a lot, with presidents, prime ministers, world-famous artists and that kind of thing. So you have to have the best spoons money can buy.

Some people say that the shareholders money has been used to buy your spoon collection?

Typical small-minded British journalism. You people can't get anything right, can you? The shareholders begged me to buy those spoons, to make their grotty little lives more interesting.

How will you cope in prison?

The interview sadly ended at this point, before we could ask Lady Black whether anything amusing had ever happened to her in connection with a spoon.

NEXT WEEK: Lord Butler – "Me and My Butler".

News In Brief

MAN FAMOUS FOR SWEARING ON TV SWEARS ON TV SHOW HE WAS HIRED TO APPEAR IN BECAUSE HE MIGHT SWEAR SHOCK

A MAN whose rise to fame was based on his ability to swear on live television has shocked the nation by swearing on a TV show. *(Reuters)*

LATEST OPINION POLL RESULTS

THE LATEST opinion poll results show a swing away from Labour and the Conservatives, with 23% of those surveyed saying they'd vote for 'I'm A Celebrity Get Me Out Of Here'.

"This sends a real message out to politicians that they should focus less on Iraq, Education and Law and Order and more on having cockroaches and spiders poured down their underpants, and if this result was translated into a general election we could well see Jordan, Ant and Dec and Peter Andre holding the balance of power," said a MORI/ICM/Guardian *(Cont. p. 94)*

'FOREIGNERS TO BLAME' FOR IRAQ CHAOS

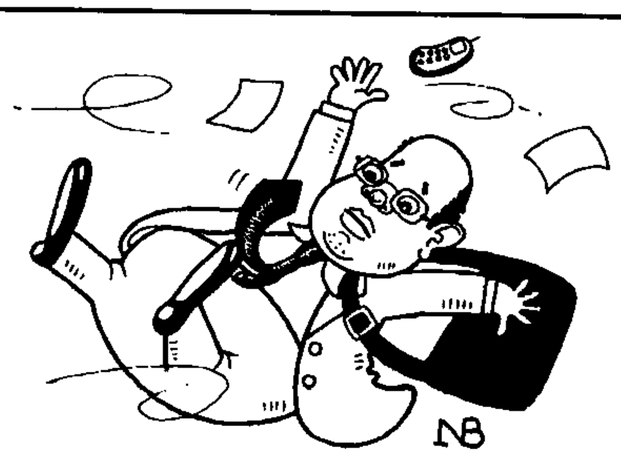
PAUL BREMER, the US Administrator in Baghdad, has blamed "foreign nationals" for the recent spate of car bombings in Iraq.

"How can the American and British forces ever hope to run Iraq peacefully if we're forever being thrown off course by the intervention of unwanted foreigners," complained the US *(Cont. p. 94)*

"And you Sharon, how do you feel about what Dave's just texted you?"

NEW-LOOK DISNEY

Nursery Rhymes Revisited (2)



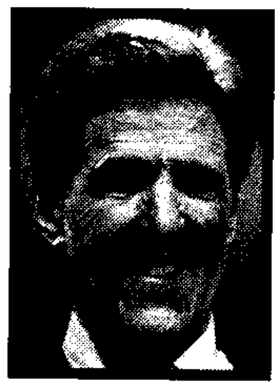
There was a young man called Andrew Gilligan
He worked for the Beeb, but I don't think he will again,
No more beans for him to spill again,
Poor old Andrew Gilligan (begin again?).

the PREMIERSH*TS

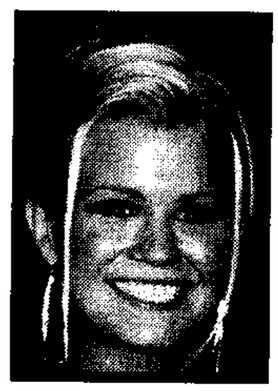
TABLOID
"WAYNE ROONEY SPAT AT ME" SAYS GIRL
BIG DEAL...
HOME AND GARDEN CENTRE
MY DAD'S BEEN GOBBED ON BY ROY KEANE, ALAN SHEARER, RUUD VAN NISTELROOY...
TURF

Those Kerrys In Full

Your at-a-glance guide to the family that is taking over the world



Senator John Kerry *(winner of New Dworkin primary)*
TALL, rich, good-looking veteran of Vietnam war with rich wife, tipped to replace President Bush next November.



Kerry McFadden *(winner of TV's Queen of Jungle contest)*
SMALL, rich, good-looking veteran of Atomic Kitten war, with rich husband, tipped to replace Gavyn Davies as BBC chairman next week.

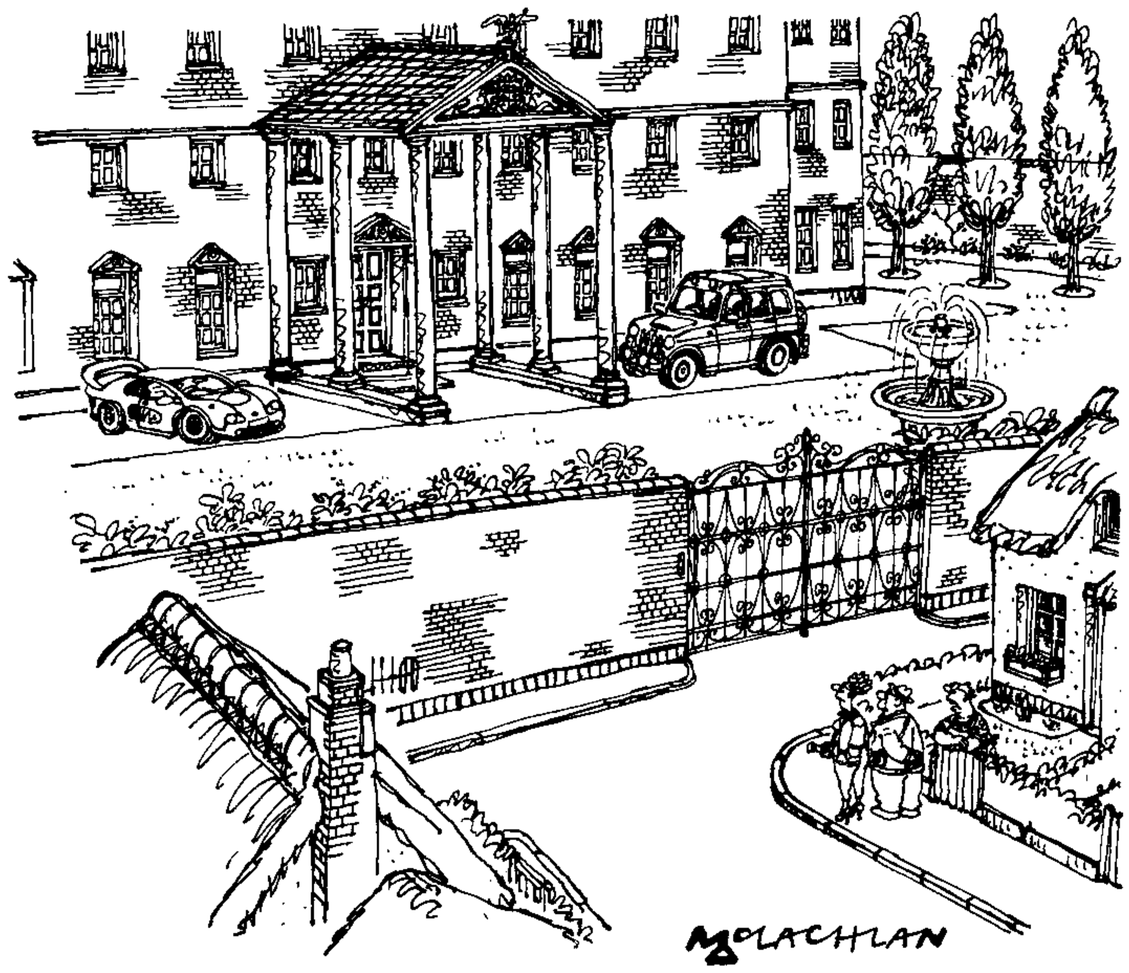
Henry Kerry *(winner of nothing)*
TALL, once-rich, smooth-talking broadcaster, veteran of ratings war, hotly tipped a lot of horses on Classic FM which invariably came last, hence his current state of bankruptcy.

Keri Te Kanawa *(winner of the 1992 Classic FM Diva of the Year Award)*
TALL, rich, good-looking veteran of Prince Charles's first wedding, she is hotly tipped to sing at his second, possibly the aria *Tampax Vagina* (surely *Vivat Rex*? Ed.)

Kesh 'n' Kerry *(winner of 'Best New South African Supermarket Chain' award 1983)*
That's enough Kerrys. Ed.

ON OTHER PAGES

Kerry Wogan wins honorary degree



"Lord of the Manor? – no, thats the local plumber"

Break-Up Of The Century

How They Are Not Related Any More

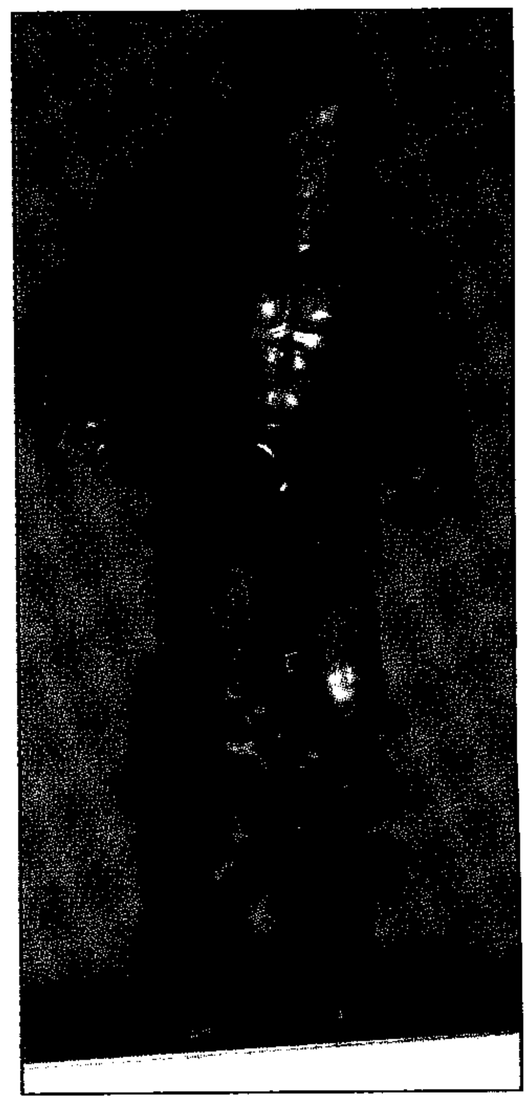
Barbarossa
|
Babar the Elephant
|
Barbara the Amiel
|
Ali Baba
|
Klaus Barbie
|
Sir John Barbierolli
|
Barbie

≠

Ethelredken
|
Red Ken
|
Ken Dodd
|
Ken Barlow
|
Ken O'Meat
|
Kenneth Kendall
|
Ken

NEW FROM GNOME TOYS

LOVE ACTION MAN™



IT's the dead of night and you're in hot pursuit of a junior warrant officer or possibly her superior or indeed anything else in a skirt!

Will you complete your mission and escape – or will you get caught and end up on Page 3 of the Daily Telegraph?

This is a job for 'Love Action Man'™!!

Love Action Man Comes Complete With

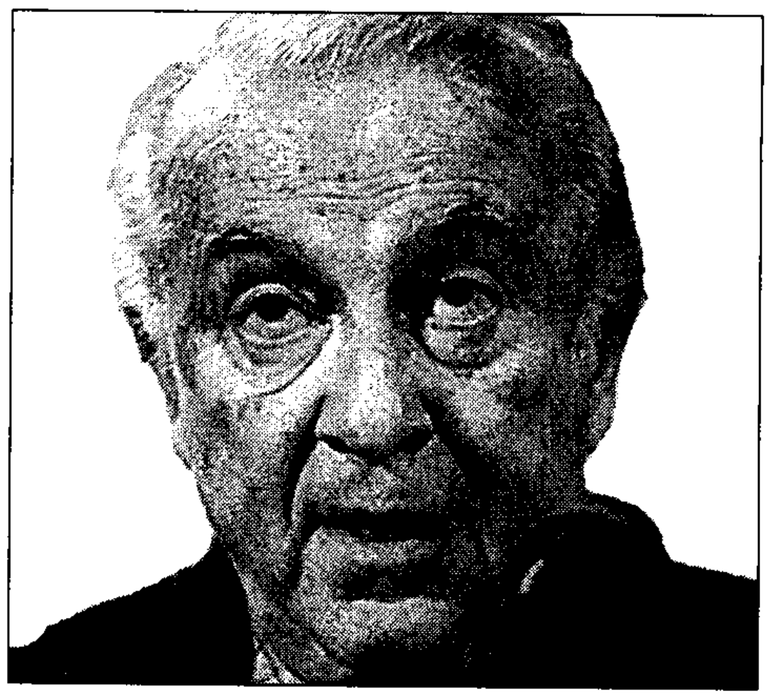
- **Major's full undress uniform**
- **Hand-held bunch of flowers**
- **Strawberry-flavoured condoms**
- **Post-coital cigarette**

PLUS ***EXTRA FEATURE***

Pull Love Action Man's ID tag and he will say *"It's not a gun in my pocket – I'm just pleased to see you"*

Love Action Man is available from all good regiments

STAGE
ALASTAIR
CAMPBELL
TOUR
45 MINUTES MR CAMPBELL!
ACT 2 SCENE 3
FIRE
THAT WAS A JOKE! LAUGH YOU PRICK!!
MISTAKES I'VE NOT MADE ANY! THEY DID IT MY WAY!
THAT WAS NO LADY THAT WAS THE PRIME MINISTER'S WIFE! BOOM! BOOM!
THESE ARE THE REVIEWS I'VE ALREADY WRITTEN FOR TOMORROW'S PAPERS
I WANNA SPIN YOU A STORY
EXIT
I THOUGHT THE BUMS WERE SUPPOSED TO BE ON SEATS!
IT'S 'DOESN'T' STAND UP COMEDY!
GREAT!
SMASH HIT!
RUN'N RUN!
HEATH



DR ATKINS'S NEW DIE REVOLUTION

The no-hunger, luxurious weight loss plan that works right up until you die – and then some!

First, let's clear up a few myths put about by those so-called "experts" whose jealousy of the Atkins Die Revolution literally knows no bounds.

Since last April – we're talking nearly a year ago now – there have been all the usual rumors. And they all say one thing. No, make that two things:

Atkins is dead, and –

Atkins died clinically obese.

These cruel myths and misconceptions – spread by my sworn enemies in the dieting community – have been accompanied by name-calling on a destructive scale.

Dr Fatkins, some of my colleagues in the dieting community have been calling me. Fatty Fatkins. Deady Fatty Fatkins. And – let me share this with you – I deplore it.

Dead? Do I look dead? Okay, so I'm lying in a box underground. Hell, maybe I've got a bit bony. But at least no-one could describe me as fat! And bony's the way I am desirous to be, right here, right now. Down below.

Correction. I prefer not to call it dead – that's a negative term, designed to help no-one. I prefer to call it "At Ease".

And let me tell you, from where I'm lying –

- I no longer worry what my colleagues are saying about me.
- I've said goodbye to strange yearnings.
- I have at last accelerated my weight loss programme and am now at a weight I find not only manageable but wholly satisfying.

And you know what? – I never felt better in years!

Let's Abandon the Assumption That You've Got to be Living to Lose Weight

Not so. A number of studies over recent months prove conclusively that a low-carbohydrate, no-exercise nutritional approach – combined with lying peacefully in a box underground – has made me – and others like me – look and feel better than ever. And I term it the New Atkins Die Revolution.

Okay, So let's place a few facts on the table.

This Might Just Be The Plan For You

The Atkins New Die Revolution can positively impact on people facing all the high-risk factors associated with remaining alive. Do you suffer from:

☐ Hypertension?

☐ Irritability?

☐ Anxiety?

☐ Discord in the home environment or in the workplace?

☐ Discomfort associated with too-tight clothing?

If you have ticked just ONE of these boxes, then the Dr Atkins New Die Revolution is literally going to change your life – and your perception of yourself. I can't wait to get you started!

First, let me explain. In the process of my investigations, I have uncovered what I call the Five UNs. Now, let me further explain.

Staying alive and breathing carries with it all sorts of UNnecessary temptations which experts have identified as UNhealthy, UNnatural, UNsettling – and clearly UNhelpful to your dieting needs.

So let's explore the alternative.

What would YOU like from a weight loss programme/ Would you like to:

☐ be freed from hunger?

☐ never have to count calories again?

☐ experience steady weight loss?

☐ minimise your risk factor for disease?

☐ reduce your appetite via a perfectly natural metabolic function of the body?

Did you tick one or more boxes? Then join me today!

A Typical Success Story

At 37 years of age, Jeff weighed 449 pounds. He was obese. His blood pressure was high. His triglycerides were through the roof. He suffered considerable back pain. He found it hard to buy pants and shirts to fit him.

Something had to give.

The day after his wife Jolene's birthday – they went for a final carboydrate diet – Jeff started Atkins New Die Revolution. On that first day, he keeled over in the street. On arrival in hospital, he was pronounced At Ease. His family grieved – you bet they did! – but by the end of Day One Jeff had reason to be proud. In just a few hours, he had lost 4 pounds – and his widow Jolene was even able to squeeze him into his favorite tuxedo! A week later, resting comfortable in his New Atkins Luxury Coffin, he had lost a further 34 pounds – and his back pain had disappeared.

Final comment from Jeff? "Yes! The New Atkins Die Revolution is one weight-loss program I'm never gonna give up on!!"

Transforming Your Inner Couch Potato

Here are five great tips for losing weight The New Atkins Die Way!

1. Eat as much as you can, whenever you can!
2. Increase your total bodyweight to 18 ½ stone – you can always find space for that extra candy muffin-burger!
3. Keel over from myocardial infarction – that's one helluva Heart Attack to you and me! – on an icy New York street in April!
4. Relax those muscles – and let your mind go blank!
5. Get yourself checked into your friendly neighborhood mortician – he'll make you look a million dollars!

Just lie back – and shed those pounds!

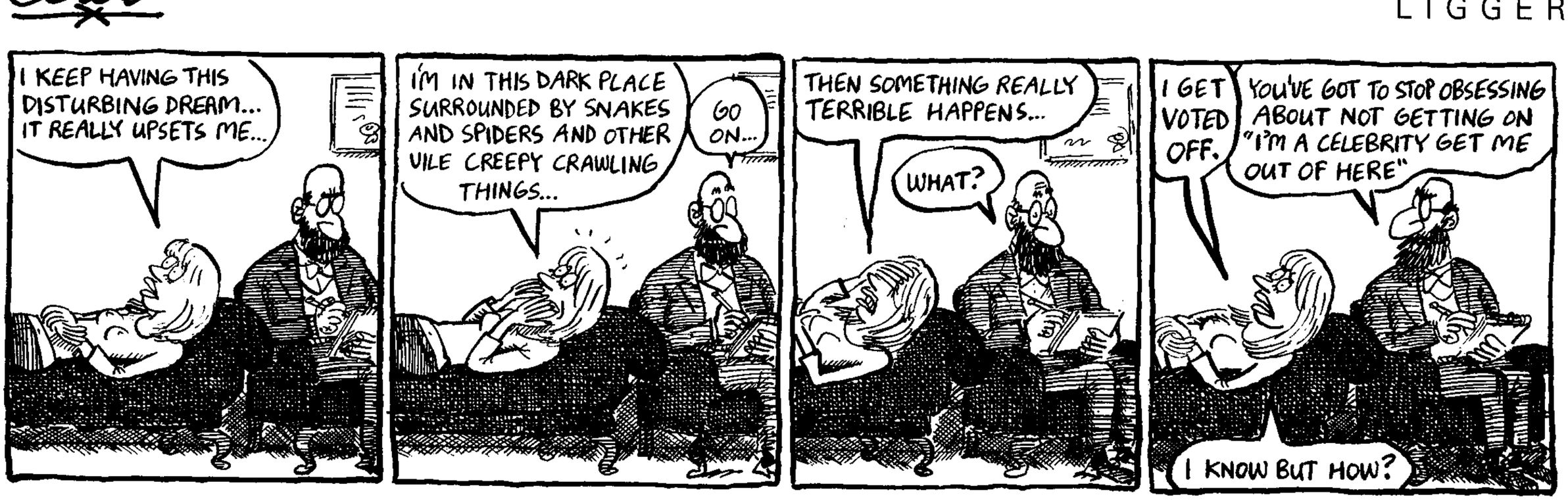
Your family may grieve. No gain without pain! And hey – not to worry – they'll get over it pretty soon!

As told to

CRAIG BROWN

Celeb

LIGGER


I KEEP HAVING THIS DISTURBING DREAM... IT REALLY UPSETS ME...
I'M IN THIS DARK PLACE SURROUNDED BY SNAKES AND SPIDERS AND OTHER VILE CREEPY CRAWLING THINGS...
GO ON...
THEN SOMETHING REALLY TERRIBLE HAPPENS...
WHAT?
I GET VOTED OFF.
YOU'VE GOT TO STOP OBSESSING ABOUT NOT GETTING ON "I'M A CELEBRITY GET ME OUT OF HERE"
I KNOW BUT HOW?

Literary Review

Ain't life grand

Literary Occasions: Essays
V.S. Naipaul
(Picador, £16.99)

WE ARE getting very grand these days, what with our Nobel Prize, our starring performances at international literary festivals and the pithy expostulation of our views in the public prints.

A sure sign of our grandeur is that we can't even be bothered to edit collections of our bygone essays ourselves; and we leave the work to respectful hired hands – in this case our biographer designate Pankaj Mishra, who contributes a notably deferential foreword. Another sign, perhaps, is our enthusiasm for lofty pronouncements: "Literature is the sum of its discoveries", for example, or "Literature, like all living art, is always on the move".

It is? And where is it moving to? In this case to an altogether finite end. Most serious writers hitting the age of 70 have a single task before them: the burnishing up of what might be called their personal myth, that glamorous and consoling mirror through which they wish to be seen, both by themselves and those who come after.

These exercises in self-definition can sometimes seem faintly bizarre. V.S. Naipaul's great friend Anthony Powell, for instance (son of an army colonel, Eton, Balliol) seriously imagined himself to be "a poor boy made good", a scale of values on which middle-class guttersnipes like Kingsley Amis are presumably transformed into care-home throw-outs.

The Naipaul variant is not so much the poor boy made good as the deracinated alien coming home to himself after endless bouts of toil and self-doubt. As stories of literary ascendancy go, his is one of the great twentieth century progresses: the humble upbringing in pre-war Trinidad; the wounded journalist father who aspired to "write" himself; the weight of Indian family myth and legend set squarely on his infant shoulders; the scholarship to England; finally the emergence of a "colonial" writer who declined to swallow the lefty line about the "Imperialism" that had formed him.

It has been told before, and here in *Literary Occasions*, principally in the essay Prologue to an Autobiography, first published in 1982, it gets told again: the blank years at Oxford, the miseries of the BBC Caribbean Service (where he fetched up in 1954), the grim anonymity of a London life lived out on the margins without friends, solace or encouragement.

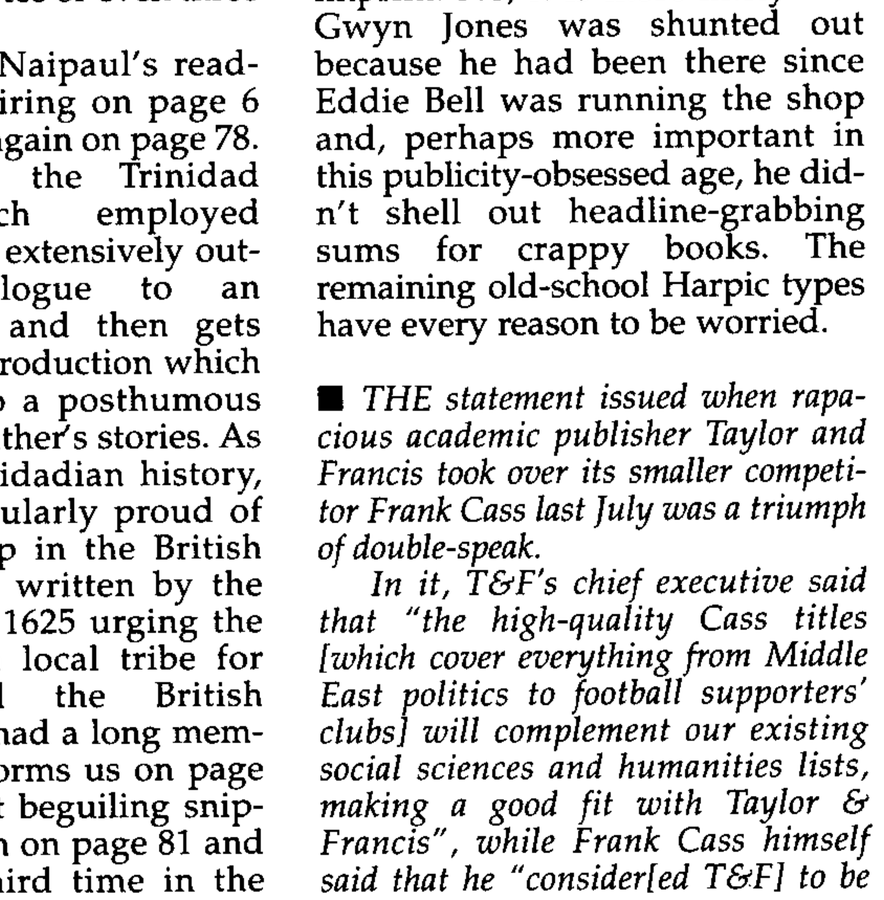
All true enough, no doubt; and yet it's a mark of these writerly dramatisations of past life that certain liberties get taken which are invisible to all but the most vigilant. In particular the vision of the near-destitute, friendless solitary working away, unregarded, at his literary apprenticeship falls apart under close inspection.

In fact the young Oxford graduate turns out to have a relative in London who lets him live in his basement. The BBC provides both a convenient berth and the paper on which to write his early stories. No sooner has his first piece flicked off the typewriter than three well-connected mentors are standing by to appraise his talent and point him in the right direction. No mention at all of Naipaul's first wife, Pat, whom he married in 1955 and who sustained him through these early travails. Hardly a Martin Amis-style storming of the London literary palisades, perhaps, but it scarcely counts as privation.

The current assemblage is in four parts: "Reading and Writing: A Personal Account", five more or less autobiographical pieces, four bits of lit crit, and finally the Nobel lecture, "Two Worlds". What distinguishes at least the first half is its eagerness to recover the same ground, a process not helped by Mishra's preface which thoughtfully introduces material that is then duplicated twice or even three times within.

The youthful Naipaul's reading lists get an airing on page 6 and then turn up again on page 78. The history of the Trinidad *Guardian*, which employed Naipaul senior, is extensively outlined in "Prologue to an Autobiography" and then gets reprised in the introduction which Naipaul wrote to a posthumous collection of his father's stories. As a student of Trinidadian history, Naipaul is particularly proud of having turned up in the British Museum a letter written by the King of Spain in 1625 urging the punishment of a local tribe for having assisted the British invaders. "Spain had a long memory," Naipaul informs us on page 19. This no doubt beguiling snippet turns up again on page 81 and emerges for a third time in the Nobel lecture, where "Spanish memories were long". Well so are book reviewers'.

In its search for the roots of the Naipaul progress *Literary Occasions* is, of course, fascinating stuff, full of p r o f u n d i t y, poignance and pain. Here and there beneath the cracks, though, come glimpses of a yet more revealing writerly quest: the search for an image.



Daniel Defoe

BOOKS & BOOKMEN

■ DOES HarpicCollins' decision to fold literary imprint Flamingo into Fourth Estate and lay off editorial director Philip Gwyn Jones make any sense?

The official reason for the move, says HarperPress md Caroline Michel, is to create a less "confused" structure and give the remaining imprints "clarity and focus". But Flamingo under Gwyn-Jones has not been conspicuously lacking in either.

In the last eight years Gwyn Jones has published a string of bestsellers, including Naomi Klein's *No Logo*, *The Restraint of Beasts* by former bus driver Magnus Mills, and *The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy. Roy even won the Booker, while Mills made the shortlist with his debut. Moreover, Gwyn Jones had a general reputation for purchasing cannily rather than extravagantly. One former colleague says admiringly that "Philip spent Murdoch's money as though it was his own, and then published the books very well indeed".

The line about confusion is rubbish. When Michel arrived the corporate structure expanded in a most confusing manner to give her control of a whole new division called HarperPress, with its own HarperPerennial paperback imprint. No, it is more likely that Gwyn Jones was shunted out because he had been there since Eddie Bell was running the shop and, perhaps more important in this publicity-obsessed age, he didn't shell out headline-grabbing sums for crappy books. The remaining old-school Harpic types have every reason to be worried.

■ *THE statement issued when rapacious academic publisher Taylor and Francis took over its smaller competitor Frank Cass last July was a triumph of double-speak.*

In it, T&F's chief executive said that "the high-quality Cass titles [which cover everything from Middle East politics to football supporters' clubs] will complement our existing social sciences and humanities lists, making a good fit with Taylor & Francis", while Frank Cass himself said that he "consider[ed T&F] to be the best partner to sustain and enhance the quality of service, reach and commitment that our authors and customers expect".

What this really means is that of Cass's 53 staff, 46 have been made redundant and the remainder are in a corner at T&F's offices in New Fetter Lane. Quite how "quality and service" can be maintained with an 86.8 percent reduction in staff is another matter, but T&F has made an art out of squeezing more out of its existing over-worked and under-paid employees with each of its acquisitions, from the takeover of Routledge in 1998 onwards.

■ THAMES VALLEY University in Reading is improving its library – by putting 100,000 books in the cellar where no one can see them.

The £26m refurbishment of the university's "Learning Resource Centre" will see its careers service and a "learning support" office shoehorned into the library space, leaving no room for the book stacks.

Students who asked how they would access the books in future were told they would be kept as a research collection in the basement and brought up on request. "These are the kind of books not usually found by browsing," they were told. "They are usually found by dedicated research."

Which rather begs the question of exactly what kind of book can not be found by browsing. Apart from those stored in basements, of course.

'Bookworm'

Warballs

"Myth. Mythology. Mythography. Mythical. Mytheme. All these terms have taken on a new resonance of late: audiences worldwide are discovering again the value, significance and fascination of ancient stories as revealed popularly in the *Star Wars*, *Harry Potter* and *Lord of the Rings* books and films... One wonders if we are living in a mythical era of epic struggles, or if escapism into heroic adventure reigns at an all-time high. The jaded cynic might answer that the most atavistic human tendencies are shining forth as a result of 9/11." — Raymond Cornier, *Bryn Mawr Classical Review*.

"Yoko [Ono] admits that she herself has changed. It came in part after the events of 11 September, when she was in Manhattan. The shock served to arrest her artistic snobbery. Soon after the attacks, she went to an art show and saw how someone had painted a clown on velvet. There was a time when she would have laughed at it. Not any more." — *Independent*.

"Two years ago, when a [Barry Manilow] greatest hits album was re-released, it went into the US charts at No 3, his highest entry ever, and he claimed a new audience. 'It's a miracle,' he said, with typical understatement. It was no miracle. The songs had stood the test of time and seemed to offer something to a nation traumatised by the tragedy of 11 September." — *Daily Express*.

IN THE BACK

PRISONS

THE INSIDE STORY

THE grisly consequences of Britain's status as the prison capital of the European union (EU) are laid bare by leaked prison security bulletins for last month.

Our overcrowded jails now house nearly 74,000 inmates – a hike of 14,000 since "new" Labour came to power. In a two-week period eight inmates killed themselves and four others made serious attempts by trying to hang themselves or taking overdoses. There were 11 serious assaults, including one where an inmate stabbed an officer in the neck with a syringe; and another where two officers were beaten, one sustaining fractured ribs.

In addition one inmate was found semi-conscious with facial injuries and another was stabbed. In one jail an inmate took a fellow inmate hostage; and in another four barricaded themselves in a cell and there were three roof protests.

Since Labour came to power incidents of self-harm in jails have risen five-fold, with nearly 15,000 inmates damaging themselves, many of them women. According to Napo, the probation union, many inmates should not be in prison in the first place. Between 5,000 and 7,000 have serious mental disorders and should be in special hospitals. More than two-thirds have milder mental illness or drink and drug problems – much of which goes untreated. First-time offenders are now much more likely to go to jail; and women in particular are now twice as likely to get a prison sentence for offences of dishonesty.

CARAT and stick

HOW exactly did inmates at Wellingborough Prison end up carrying out their own drug addiction assessments?

CARAT (counselling, assessment, referral, advice and throughcare) is part of the government's much-vaunted drug testing and treatment programme in prisons. A seven-strong team of drugs workers, including prison officers and workers from outside drug agency RAPt and the probation service, worked at Wellingborough to implement the strategy. The prison's own website explains that "all referrals are assessed by drug/alcohol counsellors" before courses, counselling and treatment are offered.

However, by early last year the CARAT team had apparently collapsed. When inspectors visited in the summer they found that "the CARAT service was seriously understaffed, with three vacant posts and one member of staff on long-term sickness absence." Drug testing targets were not being met. At one point during the year, a combination of sick leave, resignations and contracts not being renewed left *no* workers available to do the important task of interviewing prisoners about their drug habits.

Instead prisoners were asked to fill in their own forms. Asked to assess the impact of his drug use, one described himself as simply: "Totally headfucked." Another got totally carried away with ticking boxes and signed himself up to be sent information on everything, including women and addiction.

Concerned insiders at the prison contacted the prison's bosses and then prison service bosses to blow the whistle on the bizarre practice. But nothing seems to have happened.

A spokeswoman for RAPt said that it currently has no staff working at the prison although it does still have a contract. "[Allowing inmates to fill in their own assessments] is not a practice we or any of our workers would condone," she said.

The *Eye* contacted the prison service to ask a series of questions. Was it acceptable for inmates to do their own drug assessments? Why had this been allowed? Why had the CARAT team collapsed? Had anyone been disciplined for allowing it to happen?

Answer came there none.

DISCREDITED EXPERTS

Walls have ears

FRESH concerns about the medical evidence of "expert" witnesses have been raised after the court of appeal quashed the conviction of a man found guilty eight years ago of raping a five-year-old boy.

Police in Newcastle arrested Kevin Brown after a neighbour telephoned to say she was worried about cries coming from a bedroom. The boy's mother, however, said that what the neighbour had heard was her having sex with Brown.

When the boy was medically examined he was not distressed or in pain and didn't mention abuse. But in July 1996 Brown was sentenced to seven years after evidence from the now infamous paediatrician Dr Camille de San Lazaro. She was heavily criticised two years ago for her role in the case of Newcastle nursery workers Dawn Reed and Christopher Lillie (*Eyes passim*), who were falsely accused of abuse. Mr Justice Eady, in the defamation case brought by the pair against Newcastle city council, said: "Where physical findings were negative or equivocal Dr Lazaro was prepared to make up the deficiencies by throwing objectivity and scientific rigour to the winds in a highly emotional misrepresentation of the facts."

In Brown's case Dr Lazaro told the court that a slight injury to the boy's anus was likely to have been the result of assault. But the appeal court heard from other experts who said that was highly unlikely, given the child's demeanour and the lack of other physical evidence. Quashing Brown's conviction, Lord Justice Kennedy said Dr Lazaro had been "completely discredited" in the Lillie and Reed case. Misconduct charges against her are to be heard by the general medical council next month.

LEGAL NEWS

Matrix loaded

WHILE the legal aid budget is cut to the bone, excluding many more people from justice, it's a relief to know that some QCs can still make a decent living from the public purse.

QCs like Lord Brennan from Cherie Blair's Matrix chambers, for example, who last year earned no less than £606,000 in civil legal aid – more than any other barrister.

While Brennan takes from the government with one hand, he does at least do his bit to save the government money with the other. Put in charge of the home office payment scheme for the victims of wrongful imprisonment, his attempt to reduce the amount of compensation they receive is truly ingenious.

Alas, Brennan's cunning plan – to claw back a few thousand pounds for board and lodging for each and every year the victim was inside – has been deemed unlawful by the high court. Home secretary David Blunkett is appealing.

Still, it all makes work for Lord Brennan, who gets £340 per compensation assessment or £716 a day for the more complex ones.

OIL

Georgian folly?

AFTER a month's adjournment the case brought against the BP-led Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) oil pipeline in Georgia will be back in court on 20 February. Georgian Green Alternative (GA) believes it has good evidence that government ministers who signed permissions to run the massive pipeline through the Borjomi Valley caved in to pressure by the oil companies (*Eye* 1098).

The $3.4bn BTC is being created by an 11-member consortium of oil companies, led by BP, and will be capable of transporting a million barrels of crude oil a day from the Caspian Sea oil fields.

Concerned non-governmental organisations in nine countries have compiled a dossier citing 173 violations of mandatory World Bank standards by the BTC consortium in the Turkish section of the pipeline alone. These include problems with relocating the Kurdish minority population.

Heavy machinery lifting pipe along the BTC in Georgia

As well as being a beautiful landscape and delicate ecosystem, the Borjomi Valley is home to a mineral water industry which is the country's third largest export. Locals fear the pipeline could ruin all three. GA says the permissions granted by the former government break national law and international conventions and that former president Edward Shevardnadze and his environment minister were put under heavy pressure by BTC to sign them. Following the recent dramatic change of government in Georgia, GA is asking for the permissions to be revoked.

The case was postponed for a month on 20 January after it was discovered that the lawyer supposedly representing BTC had no proper authorisation to do so.

Last week the *Sunday Times* revealed allegations that a leading expert hired by BP discovered "serious flaws" in the paint coating and protecting the pipeline's 50,000 joints which would make it highly likely to leak. BP still insist the pipeline is being. produced to the "highest" industry standards.

Also last week the Azerbaijani Committee of Oil Industry Workers' Rights Protection resubmitted a complaint to the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development alleging corruption at the State Oil Company of Azerbaijan (Socar) which has a 19 percent stake in BTC. The group first submitted it in October but had no reply. Meanwhile in Georgia this month, the trade union Amalgamation revealed that workers on the BTC project are required to work 12 to 14-hour days, including weekends and holidays, for a minimum subsistence salary. The union said the conditions were against Georgian law.

Earlier this month green groups and human rights organisations blasted the Royal Bank of Scotland (RBS) – the only British lender in a banking consortium which is funding the project – for breaking its own environmental rules. RBS is signed up to the Equator Principles, a set of voluntary social and environmental principles.

Greg Muttitt, of environment group Platform, said: "Our research shows that BTC breaks the Equator Principles on numerous counts, and people and the environment will be worse off as a result." RBS, of course, says the project meets the principles. With the World and European banks as well as the UK's export credit guarantee department all willing to overlook the huge question marks over the project, it was never likely commercial lenders would take a moral stand. Maybe the Georgian courts will.

FSA

WHAT A KARI ON

AFTER the Enron meltdown it seemed extraordinary that a very senior executive of Britain's top regulator, the financial services authority (FSA), John Tiner (pictured below), should have been appointed straight from Arthur Andersen, Enron's disgraced accountant.

Nevertheless Tiner is the FSA's chief executive – and he's not beyond making the odd extraordinary appointment himself. An interesting example is his recent warm welcome for a new director of finance, strategy and risk at the FSA: Mr Kari Hale, whom Tiner knew well when both were partners at Andersens.

PS: Mr Hale is currently a partner at Deloitte and Touche. Only six days before the announcement of Hale's new appointment, the FSA fined Deloitte £750,000 for its hopeless review of pensions mis-selling by Deloitte and Touche Wealth Management.

See no evil

WHAT does it take to get the financial services authority (FSA) to investigate allegations of wrongdoing?

Two years ago Christopher Birkert was working as a freelance financial adviser for a major financial advice organisation affiliated to an international banking body. Through his work he acquired what he believes is evidence of serious breaches of compliance management rules including the wrongful access to, then loss of, client files. Exactly the kind of thing you might think the FSA is supposed to clamp down on.

Mr Birkert did what he believed to be the honest and responsible thing. In 2002 he placed all of his paper evidence with his solicitor and contacted the FSA to blow the whistle on the malpractice, explaining where they could collect the material.

When the FSA didn't approach the lawyers, he contacted the authority again. The FSA's reply was a masterpiece of fobbing off, saying his disclosure had been passed to the relevant division and it could not say more because: "The Financial Services and Markets Act prohibits the FSA in its role as a regulator from disclosing any information acquired by them using the powers."

Er, what information? Mr Birkert was puzzled since the FSA had never even contacted his lawyers, let alone looked at the papers. Fourteen months have passed and both Mr Birkert and his MP Ian Coleman have continually asked the FSA when it will look at the papers. The FSA's letters have switched from "we can't disclose information" to claiming it cannot intervene in a commercial dispute (which this isn't) and back to the "we're investigating, but can't tell you anything" excuse again.

Bizarrely the FSA reassured the *Eye* that the case was being investigated and hadn't "been kicked into the long grass". But Mr Birkert's lawyers confirm they still had all the evidence – and the FSA had never once been in touch about viewing it.

Over the hedge

WHEN share prices stop rising at enormous rates or even, god forbid, start to fall, bankers have to find more ingenious ways to make massive profits. Hence as stock markets have failed over recent years, investments in "derivatives" have exploded.

Derivatives are essentially gambles on the prices of various financial matters – interest rates, foreign exchange rates or share prices, for example. If you bet right you can make money even when the markets are falling. Inevitably, however, for every pound someone wins on a derivative, someone else loses one.

These "financial instruments" are very risky – as the fates of Enron, Barings, Long Term Capital Management and so many others demonstrate. So in most countries, including Britain, they have been banned from the mass market of unsuspecting pension savers. The experience of the United States, where public pension funds have been spectacularly ripped off by derivatives salesmen, has been scrupulously avoided. Derivatives have been available only to more adventurous investors who were prepared to put their money in funds in various tax havens. The funds sold in these places, which invest in derivatives, are known as "hedge funds".

The people who run the UK financial services industry complain that the hedge fund ban in Britain puts them at a "competitive disadvantage". Their influential lobbyists have pressed hard for a change in the rules and at last have triumphed. The *Financial Times* (31 Jan) reports that the financial services authority (FSA) is ready, at its board meeting in March, to approve new rules that will allow pension funds and charities to invest in hedge funds. Bankers and advisers are already rubbing their hands in glee at the prospect of such exciting new "product" to flog to the more gullible pension fund managers.

The FSA's decision will be greeted with special cheers at the big accountancy firm PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC). Last May it produced a long report entitled "The regulation and distribution of hedge funds in Europe – changes and challenges", which argued that the regulator (the FSA) should not be allowed to "make changes in isolation". So now the same people who brought you Equitable Life will now be able to put your pension savings into the riskiest "investments" of them all – with the approval of the FSA.

PS: PwC's assessment of the need for hedge funds in Britain cannot have been influenced in any way by the identity of the leading auditor, consultant and tax adviser to the world's hedge funds, and a self-declared "proven leader in serving the hedge funds industry", er, PwC.

FLOODING

Sold down the river

THE recent announcement that the man-made Jubilee River – the £100m-plus Thames flood relief for Windsor and Eton – is back in working order isn't good news for residents downstream.

Riverside dwellers in Chertsey, Wraysbury and Staines blame the new canal (which during high rainfall diverts Thames floodwater) for the unprecedented floods they suffered in January last year. The excess water taken by the canal is returned to the Thames at Datchet, just upstream of the flood area. They maintain that the canal surge, coupled with the Thames' flow, caused the problem.

Thus residents down river were rather pleased that the Jubilee River wasn't fully operational during the recent heavy downpours. A year down the line, some have only just finished repairing their damaged properties.

The environment agency (EA), which has always denied the flooding had anything to do with the Jubilee, is about to release a report which is expected to exonerate it. But that will not convince residents who have gathered their own evidence. And nor will it please them to learn that the costs of the Jubilee River are still rising.

The EA has just spent £1.9m of taxpayers' money on this year's repairs – mainly to the Jubilee's banks, which could not cope with its first use – and more repairs are scheduled this summer. It seems there were so many contractors involved in the work, the agency doesn't know who to blame. Take your pick from the six main players, Lewin, Fryer & Partners, Cooper & Lybrand, the Babtie Group, Balfour Beatty Civil Engineering Ltd, Edmund Nuttall Ltd and Halcrow.

HEP C

No-fault line

PUBLIC health minister Melanie Johnson's (left) defence of the government's miserly £20,000 to £45,000 "compassion" payment to haemophiliacs and others infected with the deadly liver virus hepatitis C from contaminated blood products was pure "new" Labour sophistry.

She told Radio 4's *Woman's Hour* that the only reason other countries, like Ireland and Canada, had paid out 10 times as much over bad blood products was because there had been public or criminal inquiries which had found that there had been "wrongful practices". She said: "The government does not accept any fault on he government's part. Nor has anyone been able to show that there is some."

The reason no one has been able to show there has been wrong practice is because the government has consistently refused any inquiry. And the reason it won't order an inquiry is because it would show that successive governments and health chiefs, Labour and Tory, were at fault in a massive public health disaster.

It would reveal that in the early 1970s doctors in California wrote to Britain's Blood Products Laboratory asking that we no longer source blood products from commercial blood centres in the US because of the high rates of "post transfusion" hepatitis. More than half of these were known even then to be a non A, non B hepatitis (later hep C).

"Whatever this agent may be, it is more frequently encountered in the lower socio-economic group of paid and prison donors… it is minimal among volunteer donors," wrote Dr J. Garrott Allen in January 1975. "Commercial blood banking perpetuates the high-risk rates for hepatitis we encounter with their products, and it also tempts these same commercial firms to sell the residual products from these high risk donors."

The Lancet had also just reported that a new hepatitis virus (later to be called hep C) had been isolated and was responsible for 90 percent of transfusion-associated illness in the US.

But it seems we gave little thought to the warnings. Despite the then health secretary Dr David Owen's promise that the UK would be self-sufficient in blood products by 1977, and even though he made more resources available to the regional blood centres to achieve that, it never happened. Blood continued to be brought in from known dodgy operations abroad and the haemophiliac community and others are living – and dying – as a result.

How Melanie Johnson can claim the UK cannot be faulted because it acted as soon as a test for hepatitis C became available in 1991 is a mystery.

FOLLOW-UPS...

■ **CAFCASS:** After the "resignation" of the entire board of Cafcass in December – bar one Judy Weleminsky – the hunt is on for a new chief executive for the troubled family court service.

Cafcass has been in the hands of a caretaker, Jonathan Tross, who was brought in after Diane Shepherd began a spot of gardening leave when the then lord chancellor Derry Irvine got "on the case" of the floundering service. While the post is advertised, the smart money is on the internal promotion of legal services director Charles Prest, who insiders expect will be rewarded for unfailing loyalty when all others have left or been pushed.

Whoever triumphs, the £120,000-plus benefits package is substantially more than the £80,000 Ms Shepherd received and has further demoralised the self-employed guardians (who haven't had a penny increase in their hourly rate for two years). Meanwhile waiting lists for vulnerable children who need court guardians are still growing…

You can contact Paul Foot on 020 7287 3183 or the In the Back team on 020 7437 4017

In the City

VICTIMS of the Equitable Life scandal who suspect the Treasury's introduction last month into this potentially expensive equation of the Serious Farce Office has much to do with prevarication and little to do with prosecution may not be all wrong.

The SFO has a dismal record (played three, lost three with one game that could yet be called off pending) when it comes to prosecuting fraud at insurance companies, even those more obvious than Equitable. So it is unlikely to rush to take on the far from Equitable challenge.

But so long as that is a possibility then the Treasury have the cast iron excuse of the prospect of criminal prosecutions, however slim, as a legal reason to delay full or even edited publication of Lord Penrose's clearly far from complimentary report into the catalogue of boardroom and regulatory failures which could demand Barlow Clowes-style compensation to the Equitable policyholders.

The SFO is expected to form a preliminary view as to whether there are possible criminal offences by the end of this month. Just in time for a decision from the Treasury on publication, already delayed until after the Commons reconvene next week. The Treasury is not only a Penrose target, as a former failed Equitable regulator, but is the ultimate deep pocket. So that's why it has been sitting on the report since before Christmas.

The SFO is understood to be examining a number of Equitable issues including possible false accounting, deception and the reinsurance policy that wasn't. For several years Equitable's accounts contained a clearly false picture of the liabilities under guaranteed annuity rate policies which forced its closure to new business in 2000, soon after the Law Lords decreed it must honour those guarantees. Existing and new policyholders were encouraged to pay premiums on the basis of those untrue and unfair accounts. A suicidal bonus policy saw Equitable paying out more and more to attract ever expanding new business. Just like a Ponzi or circular money fraud, without new money the game was up. So deceptive projections of future performance and security were made on a daily basis.

Finally, when the house of cards began to totter in 1998, Chris Headdon , then the Equitable financial boss and former appointed actuary, conjured up a £700m reinsurance treaty to cover the GAR liabilities. Except that it did not. In 1999 Headdon quietly reassured the reinsurers, GE Capital offshoot Ireco, that Equitable would claim nothing like the full £700m it had already written into its balance sheet to reassure regulators. When a £1.6bn "black hole" emerged Ireco were out of there and Equitable were down the tubes.

But only the last of these matters is remotely the type of issue that might, just might, be considered jury friendly. The others rely entirely on the clashing expert evidence of actuaries, those number crunchers for whom accountancy was too exciting. And it has already been demonstrated by both the old and new Equitable boards, the policyholder action groups, former auditors Ernst & Young and the ex-directors defending themselves in civil actions brought by the present directors – not forgetting regulators at the Department of Timidity & Inaction, the Treasury and the Financial Services Authority – that you can have as many "expert opinions" as there are experts.

The prospect of duelling actuaries bemusing jurors with endless tables of figures and formulae is hardly one to inspire the SFO to rush to the Treasury's rescue. Especially as following the recent Court of Appeal ruling over cot death prosecutions, if undoubted "experts" disagree then can the criminal test of "beyond a reasonable doubt" be met?

"There's just no shame nowadays!"

This factor is particularly relevant for the SFO, with its depressing record in insurance-related fraud cases. One of the reasons for the SFO's creation was the inability of the previous prosecutorial system to deal with complex cases such as those from the Lloyd's insurance market. No action had been taken over a series of Lloyd's scandals which emerged from the early Eighties. The most recent prosecution in 1982 of insurance broker Christopher Moran (now a prominent fundraiser for charity) for alleged fraud involving aviation reinsurance resulted in acquittals. Among the SFO's first cases were the two biggest Lloyd's scandals – Alexander Howden and PCW.

Howden's chairman, Kenneth the "Grobfather" Grob, and underwriter Ian Posgate, were both tried but acquitted in 1989. Grob faced multiple charges of theft. Posgate was charged with conspiracy to steal. Three of Grob's co-directors had already either died or been found too ill to be tried. A year later the DTI, in a report delayed because of the trial, convicted Grob of plundering $41m from Howden. He died an "innocent man" in 1991.

PCW was an even bigger fiasco. Ace crooks underwriter Peter Cameron Webb and his finance man Peter Dixon fled to the United States. The SFO so mishandled the case that by the time warrants for their arrest were finally issued in 1988 they were home free because of the expiration of the statute of limitations on prosecution. Both men were also "convicted" by the DTI in 1990, this time of stealing $53m.

Following this unhappy chapter of errors the SFO sleepwalked its way into allowing three more Lloyd's pillagers to escape prosecution. Ronnie Driver (father of film star Minnie) and his colleagues at London United Investments escaped legal retribution for stealing $54m after the SFO allowed itself to get bogged down in the legal morass of seeking evidence from Liechtenstein where Driver and his pals had hidden the money instead of nailing them with simpler charges. By the time the first evidence was received in 2000, 10 years after LUI crashed and eight years after the investigation began, Driver was too old and supposedly too ill to face trial. A year later the SFO finally dropped the case faced with the impossibility of obtaining the necessary further information within any reasonable time.

Currently the SFO is struggling to bring a prosecution arising from the collapse in 2001 of Independent Insurance which had 600,000 policyholders. Six months ago SFO insiders were confident of being able to bring charges against former chief executive Michael Bright and maybe two other executives before the end of 2003, even though there was an acceptance that it would be a difficult case. Now, although charges are still expected, these are less confidently predicted and the time scale is far less certain. Once again reinsurance agreements and who knew and did what with them will be key. None of this is exactly juror friendly.

Equitable Life promises/threatens to be far more complex and difficult than Independent, never mind Lloyd's and LUI. Given this background it will be no surprise if the SFO is unenthusiastic to set off down another primrose insurance path lined with thorns. However, it may be difficult to pass the problem back to the Treasury too quickly in view of the stakes involved for both regulation and compensation.

But even if the SFO decides to take a closer look – thereby keeping the Treasury off the hook for a while longer – any decision to launch a full criminal investigation is unlikely to result in any different result than Howden, PCW and LUI. But of course its very existence and the "risk" of contempt could justify no publication of the Penrose report in full or filleted until any trial had been completed. It would also halt in its tracks with double jeopardy the two civil actions for £2.6bn and £3.3bn brought by Equitable against its former auditors and directors. So all those guilty of acts of commission and omission around the City could breathe easily for a very long time. Something they most certainly do not deserve.

WHILE waiting on the SFO, the Treasury is cutting costs in the fight against international fraud. It has decided to stop funding with the Foreign Office the White Collar Crime Investigation Team (WCCIT) which since 1993

THE DIRECTORS

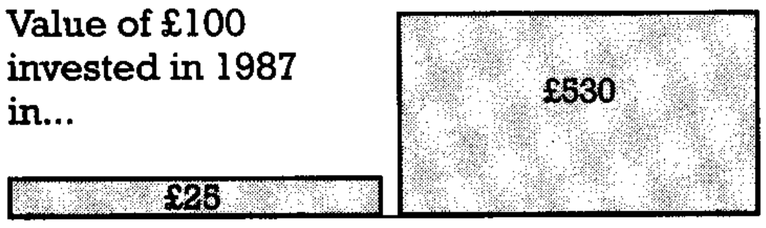
DREDGE & RIGG

WON'T A MASSIVE DEBT BURDEN DAMAGE A STUDENT'S CREATIVITY ?
DR.C.B.
160.
NOPE - IT'LL DO IT GOOD !
HE KNOWS IF HE'S NOT CREATING WEALTH FOR ME HE'S DEAD IN THE WATER !

Stock Horror

by 'Bruin'

Eurotunnel under water



has been chasing those bad guys who operate in and through Britain's former Caribbean colonies turned tax havens.

Based in Florida, a two detective Scotland Yard/City Police team, plus analysts and liaison officers in the havens, worked with the FBI covering Anguilla, Bermuda, the British Virgin Islands, Caymans, Montserrat and the Turks & Caicos. All have been and continue to be hotbeds of fraud and money laundering. But while the FBI and the Canadian authorities had a long list of results – assets worth more than $30m have been seized – there has never been much of a UK dividend other than in tans, travel and police overtime. There have been few if any British prosecutions made by WCCIT although it has provided vital help in cases like tracing the £2m in bribes paid to corrupt CWS executives. However, all this was not enough for its Foreign Office paymasters. They, pushed by the Treasury have decided WCCIT is not cost-effective and it will close down next month.

PROSECUTING jury "nobbling" is easier than prosecuting complex insurance frauds, but not much. So it is no surprise that the Scotland Yard investigation into allegations of approaches to jurors in Andrew Regan's second and third trials last year has failed to produce any evidence to merit a prosecution. The second trial was stopped and a juror was released from the third trial at the end of which Regan was acquitted of stealing the £2.4m from his company, Hobson, which was used to pay the £1m-a-CWS man bribes.

As detailed in *Eye* 1087, in both trials jurors admitted either publically or privately that they had been offered bribes – £10,000 first, £40,000 the second time. In neither case was it possible to identify those who made the approaches or who was behind the attempts. There was no evidence to connect Regan with the approaches.

This result will no doubt further encourage Regan's City page friends to continue their lobbying for his rehabilitation.

SHAREHOLDERS in HBOS should be pressing the directors for an explanation over how Bank of Scotland, sponsors of the Scottish Premier League, come to be propping up 10 of the league's 12 soccer clubs with between £150m and £200m of what look like increasingly bad or high risk loans. Three SPL clubs have already collapsed into administration due to sky-high wages and no Sky TV money. More could follow.

These loans mostly built up before BoS merged with Halifax in 2001. In 1998 total SPL debts were below £20m. One of the architects of that flawed policy was former BoS managing director Gavin Masterton, who resigned after the merger. Masterton was a big football fan and director of Dunfermline, a BoS customer which could be the next to go.

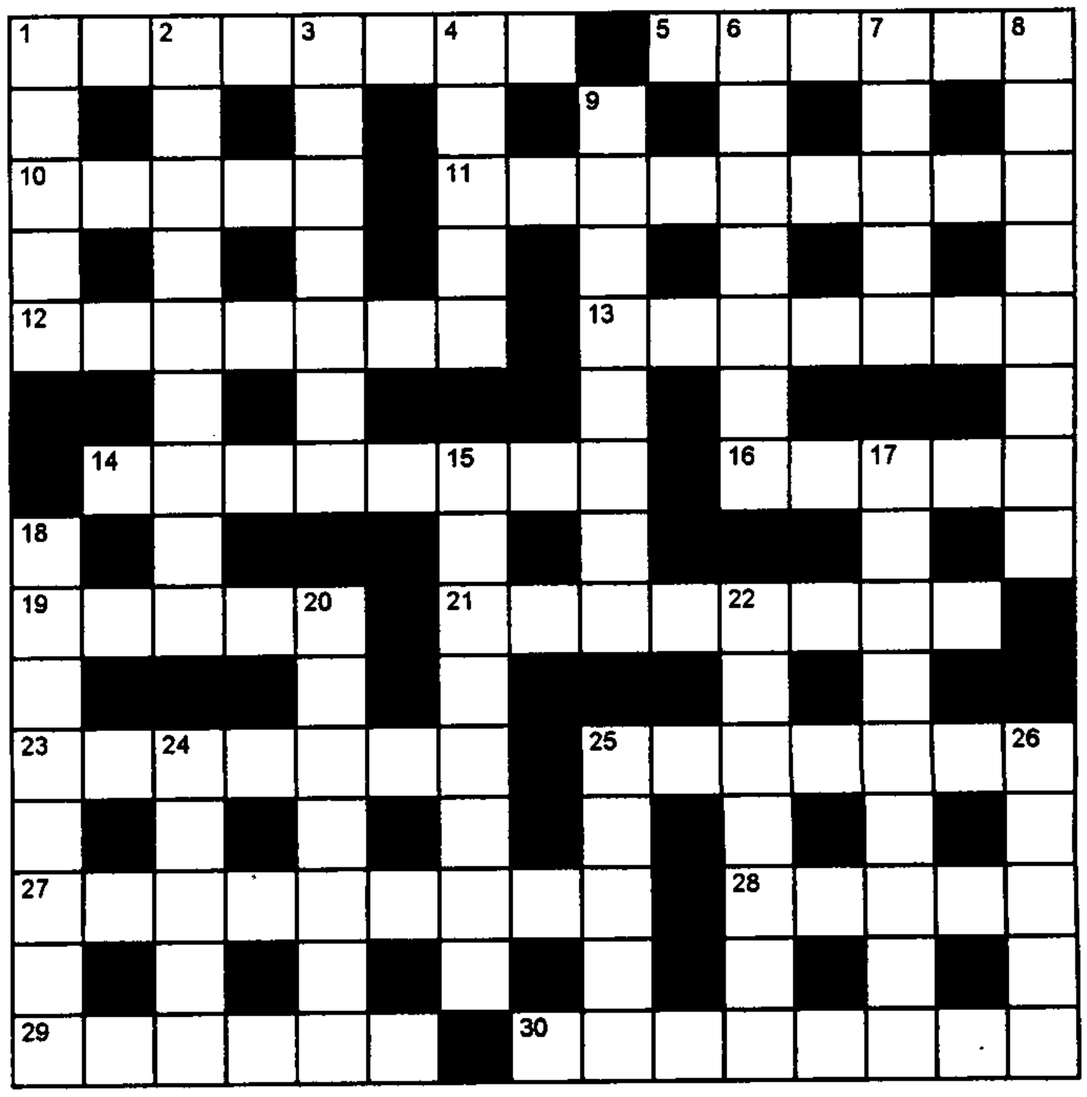
After leaving BoS Masterton set up Stadia Investment Group to develop SPL and other soccer clubs' property assets. Stadia is now in financial difficulties. Two subsidiaries are in receivership. BoS was also a lender to Stadia. Masterton is now negotiating a possible rescue of Stadia by a company in which BoS is a big shareholder.

Doesn't that all look a bit too cosy for comfort?

'Henry Slicker & Associates'

EYE CROSSWORD 255

by Cyclops



£100 prize to first correct solution opened on 27 February 2004.

Entries to 'Crossword', Private Eye, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN or via email to crossword@private-eye.co.uk

ACROSS

1/11 Pissed off "Iron Maiden" a lot, Ted (5,3,9)
5 *Sun*'s core journalist, trapped in drink and knackered (4-2)
10 Topless, go arse over tip and produce tears (3,2)
11 See 1
12 One sort of sex that's practised by Brenda in a carriage (7)
13 Drink to Cyclops, getting in – way back – with Charlie Watts (7)
14 One way to top your rivals on St Valentine's Day (8)
16 Come to see basement club removed (5)
19 Go limp, pointlessly and frequently (5)
21 Orange constituent's interest in NICAM TV broadcast (7,1)
23 Blair broadcast off – "snake bag" relieved by peer (7)
25 No Cambridge blue, Donald (7)
27/30 Number one high point popular within AA (local supplier) the idiot couldn't arrange (1,4-2,2,1,7)
28 For saddos he exists as an anagram of himself (5)
29 When around, Mowlam's a spicy thing (6)
30 See 27

DOWN

1 Beat heartless object of great affection (5)
2 Hardly attractive, gen up on getting screwed during rave (9)
3 According to rapper, newspapers get a person down (7)
4 Wanting nooky every evening depraves youth leaders (5)
6 "Boobs revealed when underwear raised" (*Sun*) (4-3)
7 Dug up material (5)
8 Get one's way to the detriment of one's privates? (4,4)
9 Exhibited by those who get chicken, not hot dogs (4,4)
15 Bristol supporters draping balls in security blankets (5-3)
17 Cunning ploy to get bloke to do 'ousework, it's said (9)
18 High-ups' fling includes Penny and her underwear (3,5)
20 Girl's breaking balls of strippers (7)
22 Couple holding leftie hero's chopper (7)
24 Accepted truth of "the end of sex" in an offshore location (5)
25 Andy's up Bar 900 (5)
26 Filthy erection of one filthy place (5)

Crossword 254 winner: MARK WHITEHEAD

ACROSS: 1 Geriatric 6 Susan 9 Timor 10 Frogmarch 11 On a diet 12 Britpop 13 The Three Rs 16 Parr 18 Pips 19 Spider hole 22 Scourge 23 Nose job 25 Interview 26 Bumps 27 Sudan 28 Elbow room.

DOWN: 1 Get lost 2 Rumba 3 Airtight 4 Refit 5 Clobbered 6 Summit 7 Strappado 8 No-hoper 14 Exploited 15 Expletive 17 Crossbow 18 Pussies 20 Embosom 21 Dry run 23 Nawab 24 Jumbo.

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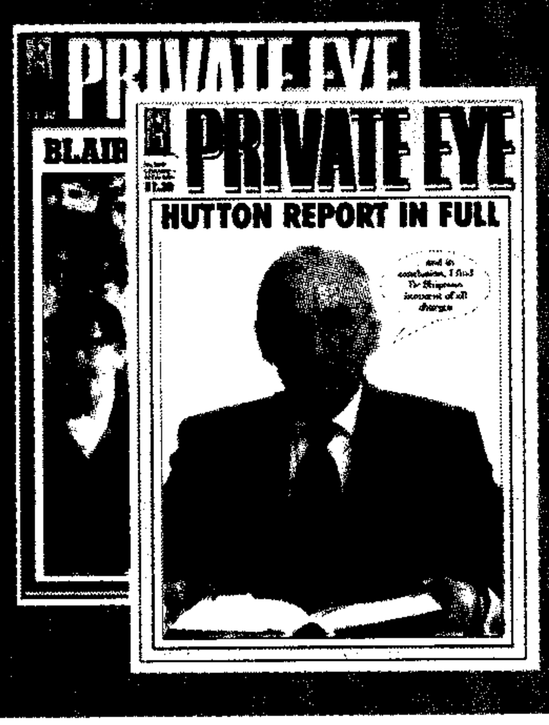

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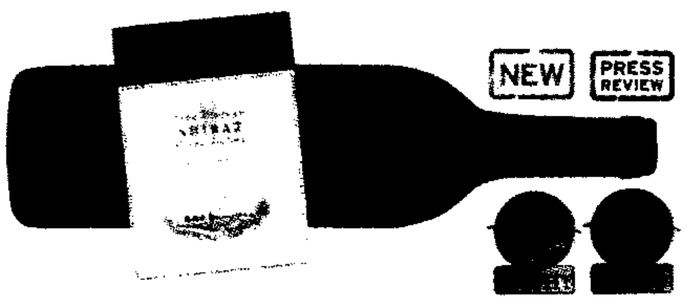

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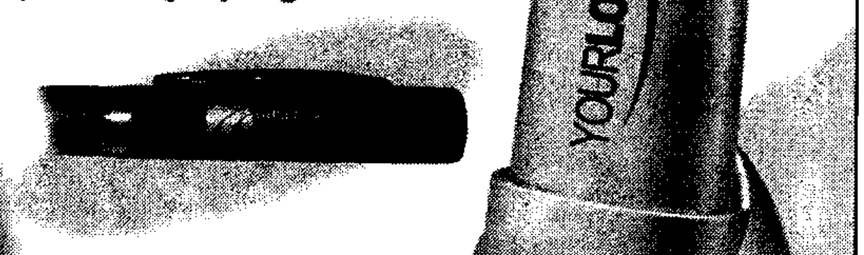

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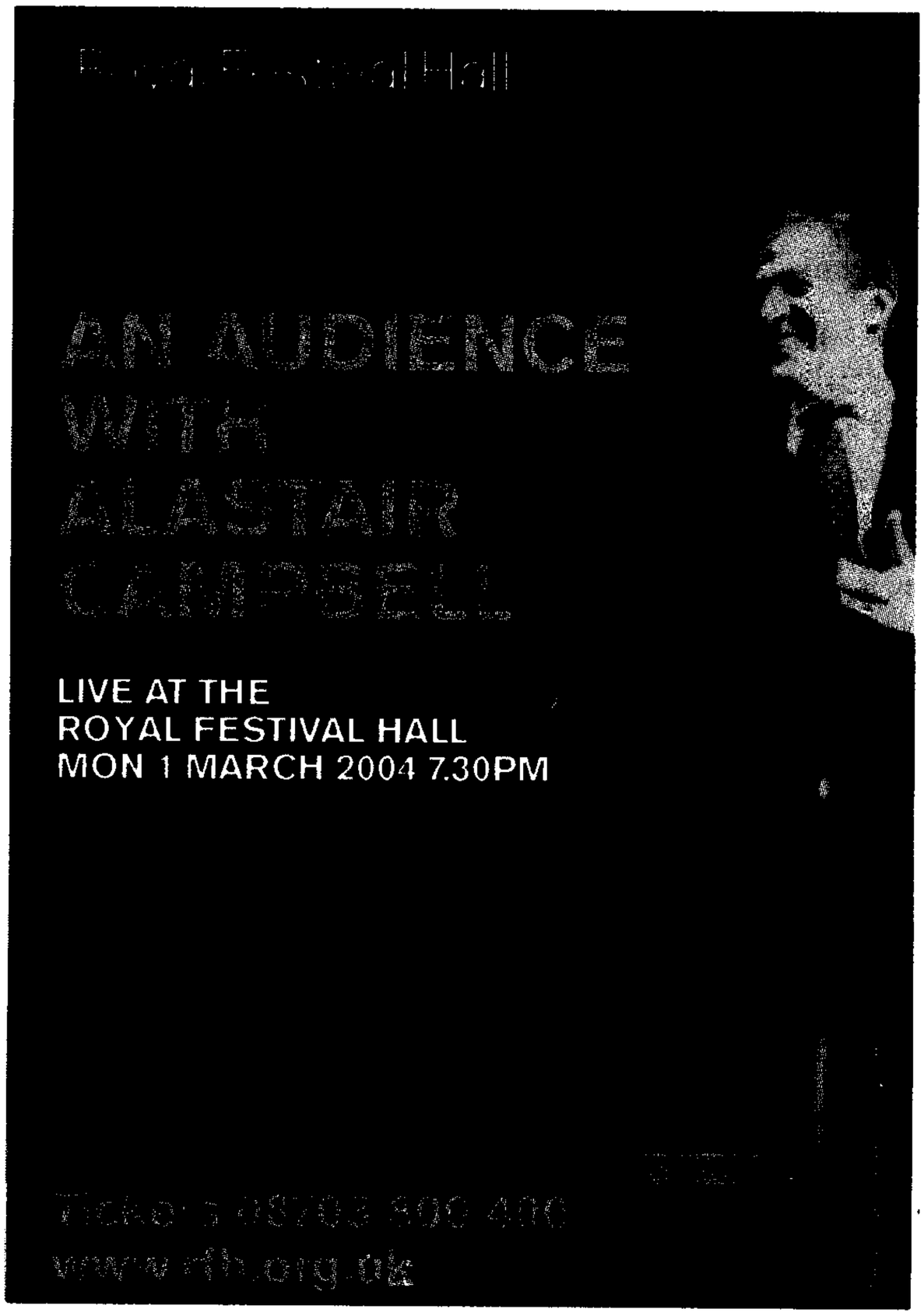

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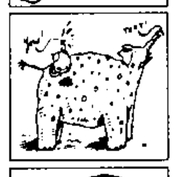

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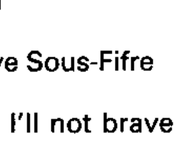

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OFFICIAL FUEL CONSUMPTION IN MPG (LITRES/100KM): SAAB 9-3 2.0T AERO SPORT SALOON FITTED WITH 5-SPEED MANUAL GEARBOX: URBAN 23.3 (12.1), EXTRA URBAN 44.1 (6.4), COMBINED 33.2 (8.5). CO_2 EMISSIONS 202G/KM. 9-3 RANGE FROM £16,995. 2.0T AERO MODEL SHOWN £24,000 OTR.

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